

# Middlesex University Research Repository

An open access repository of

Middlesex University research

<http://eprints.mdx.ac.uk>

Charles, Matthew (2009) Speculative experience and history: Walter Benjamin's Goethean Kantianism. PhD thesis, Middlesex University. [Thesis]

This version is available at: <https://eprints.mdx.ac.uk/3449/>

## Copyright:

Middlesex University Research Repository makes the University's research available electronically.

Copyright and moral rights to this work are retained by the author and/or other copyright owners unless otherwise stated. The work is supplied on the understanding that any use for commercial gain is strictly forbidden. A copy may be downloaded for personal, non-commercial, research or study without prior permission and without charge.

Works, including theses and research projects, may not be reproduced in any format or medium, or extensive quotations taken from them, or their content changed in any way, without first obtaining permission in writing from the copyright holder(s). They may not be sold or exploited commercially in any format or medium without the prior written permission of the copyright holder(s).

Full bibliographic details must be given when referring to, or quoting from full items including the author's name, the title of the work, publication details where relevant (place, publisher, date), pagination, and for theses or dissertations the awarding institution, the degree type awarded, and the date of the award.

If you believe that any material held in the repository infringes copyright law, please contact the Repository Team at Middlesex University via the following email address:

[eprints@mdx.ac.uk](mailto:eprints@mdx.ac.uk)

The item will be removed from the repository while any claim is being investigated.

See also repository copyright: re-use policy: <http://eprints.mdx.ac.uk/policies.html#copy>

**Speculative Experience and History:  
Walter Benjamin's Goethean Kantianism**

A thesis submitted to Middlesex University  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Matthew Charles

School of Arts and Education

Middlesex University

November 2009

## **Abstract**

My thesis explicates and defends what I term an implicit Goetheanism present in the philosophy of Walter Benjamin. It begins by examining Benjamin's early critique of the Kantian and neo-Kantian concept of experience and argues that a Goethean theory of the primal phenomenon provides the phenomenological model for Benjamin's radical transformation of the neo-Kantian Idea. I analyse the importance of Goethe's aesthetics of science for Benjamin's critical development of Early German Romanticism and suggest that Goethe's tender empiricism provides the intellectual backdrop to Benjamin's later materialism. The chromatic-linguistic model of experience which informs Benjamin's earliest writings is shown to develop into a dialectics of refractive expression, one that has import consequences for his concept of history and his unorthodox version of cultural materialism. My final chapter examines the influence of Goethe upon what it argues is Benjamin's quasi-Jungian criticism of Marxism, defending the importance of Jung's semiotic critique of Freud's theory of dream symbolism and its relevance for a materialist interpretation of ideology. The relationship between the Goethean and Jungian concepts of synthesis explains Benjamin's proximity to a Jungian concept of the unconscious, it is argued, which is justified on the condition that a critique of Jung distinguishes the archaic image from Benjamin's dialectical image. This is performed in the final chapter through a consideration of the allegorical and the technological in Jung and Benjamin's differing receptions of Goethe's *Faust*. The existential component of Goethe's speculative concept of experience provides Benjamin with the resources for thinking of a dialectic of historical completion and incompleteness, it is concluded, which is necessary for a philosophical informed cultural materialism.

## **Acknowledgements**

This thesis was completed with the generous support of a Research Student Tutorship from the School of Arts and Education at Middlesex University. I would like to thank Peter Osborne for his criticism and encouragement, my colleagues in the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy for their provocations, Charmain Alleyne in the School Research Office and the staff of the British Library for their help, and my family, and especially my parents, for their support. To Michele, I shall be forever indebted.

# Contents

<b>Preface: Metacritique of the Purism of Historical Reason</b>	i
<b>1. The Neo-Kantian Problematic: Walter Benjamin and the Metaphysics of Experience</b>	
1.1 Speculative Experience and the Possibility of Metaphysics in Kant	1
1.2 The Neo-Kantian Problematic: Trendelenburg, Fischer and Cohen	3
1.3 Hermann Cohen and Kant's <i>Theory of Experience</i>	7
1.4 Hamann's Metacritique of the Purism of Reason	14
1.5 Metacritique or Theological Nostalgia?	18
Coda: Towards a Metaphysics of Experience	22
<b>2. Walter Benjamin's "Tender Empiricism": Towards a Materialist Theory of Ideas</b>	
2.1 The Problem of Biological Experience in Kant	25
2.2 The Romantic Theory of Experiment and the Problem of Form	29
2.3 "To Portray Rather Than Explain": Goethe's Aesthetics of Science	35
2.4 The Scientific Genius: Imagination and Production	39
2.5 <i>Urphänomen</i> and Experienceability (I): Art	44
2.6 <i>Urphänomen</i> and Experienceability (II): Technology	48
<b>3. On Human Life and Life as Such: Refractive Dialectics and Historical Judgement</b>	
3.1 Kant's Historical Sign: Idealism and Realism in Historical Experience	59
3.2 The Weak Messianism of Early German Romanticism	62
3.3 The Principle of Refraction: Chromatic-Linguistic Models of Experience	67
3.4 Goethe's "Masked Penance":	
From Messianic Redemption to Allegorical Eschatology	78
3.5 Benjamin's Dialectical Image: Virtuality and Synthesis	86
Coda: the Judgement of History	94
<b>4. Expressive Materialism and Phantasmagorical Semblance</b>	
4.1 Capitalism as Religion:	
the Critique of a Reflective Conception of Ideology	100
4.2 The Interpretation of Collective Dreams	106
4.3 Psychosynthesis:	
Jung's Semiotic Critique of the Freudian Unconscious	116
4.4 The Phantasmagoria of Ideology	126
4.5 "Pale and Fleeting Clearings in History":	132
Dialectical Image, Phantasmagorical Presencing	
<b>5. Epilogue: Walter Benjamin in the Dream-House of Goethe</b>	144
Abbreviations and Bibliography	149

## Preface: Metacritique of the Purism of Historical Reason

– *A visit to Goethe's house.*

– Walter Benjamin, 'No. 113', *One-Way Street*

This work is orientated by the belief that the condition of any properly critical cultural, sociological or historical investigation of the recent past is an adequate philosophy of history; that the central problem for the philosophy of history is theorizing a speculative concept of historical experience; and that Walter Benjamin's philosophy continues to provide the best resource for articulating such a concept. The precipitating problem is one – familiar from a postmodern 'incredulity towards metanarratives' predicated on 'the crisis of metaphysical philosophy' – of grounding any totalizing narrative of a universal history from the standpoint of the present.<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, for example, inhabits this problem when he depicts communism as the world-historical consummation of the dialectic of productive forces in the *Communist Manifesto*. For in his analysis of actual historical events, such as the coup d'état of Napoleon III in the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, the historical significance of the role of class interests is permitted as a non-ideological and 'real depiction – of our historical material' only on the basis of the assumption that history is always the universal history of class struggle.<sup>2</sup> The circularity of this relationship becomes apparent the more its Marxist-Hegelianism is exposed to a materialist version of the objection which Paul Ricoeur has directed at Hegel: 'It now seems to us as though Hegel, seizing a favourable moment, a *kairos*, which has been revealed for what it was to our perspective and our experience, only totalized a few leading aspects of the spiritual history of Europe and of its geographical and historical environment, ones that, since that time, have come undone'.<sup>3</sup>

The contention here is that the answer to this question supposes a theoretical approach capable of mediating between two senses of history (a philosophy of history and a mode of historical analysis) and the possibility of doing so hinges on the justification of a metaphysical concept of historical experience. Marx, following Hegel, neglected to address this problem because historical experience appeared a self-evident category from the immanent perspective of the bourgeois revolutions of the late-eighteenth century and an anticipated epoch of proletarian uprisings sweeping across

---

1 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington & Brian Massumi, (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1984), p.xxiv.

2 Karl Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte', *Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire*, trans. Terrell Carver, (London, Pluto Press, 2002), p.6; Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, ed. C. J. Arthur, (New York, International Publishers, 2004), p.48; cf. Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, (London, Penguin, 1985), p.79.

3 Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen Blamey & David Pellauer, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1988), Vol. 3, pp.204-205.

Europe in the late-nineteenth century. The resulting foreshortening of the historical perspective rendered the problem of historical experience – including its attendant problems of historical significance, value, or meaning – redundant for Hegel and Marx. As Peter Osborne has argued, ‘Hegelian philosophy must always eternalize its *own* present, if it is to offer the possibility of an absolute knowing’ through which ‘the future is treated as wholly immanent to the rationality of the present, the present of the interpretation’.<sup>4</sup>

It is only with the perceived limitations of historicist versions of Hegelianism and Marxism towards the end of the nineteenth century that this question in the philosophy of history could first appear as a problem, and it did so within the context of Wilhelm Dilthey’s and the neo-Kantian’s analyses of the epistemological status of the social sciences and in particular that of history. The merit of George Simmel’s implicitly neo-Kantian essay *The Problems of the Philosophy of History*, written and revised in various editions between 1892 and 1916, lies in sharpening our focus upon the philosophical relationship between historical materialism and communism. Whilst the work’s transcendental deduction of the possibility of historical enquiry in general is problematic, not least because it reiterates the unreflective ahistoricism of Kant’s own critical project, it remains valuable for posing the question of historical significance in relation to the conditions of possibility for experience.<sup>5</sup> Simmel’s early epistemological studies – in common with neo-Kantianism – may be characterised as a generalization of Kant’s transcendental methodology into the realm of social sciences:

The initial result of these studies – set out in the book *The Problems of the Philosophy of History* – was the following basic idea. In exactly the sense that the categories of the understanding constitute the perceptually given material of the world as the concept of nature, so the a priori categories of the intellect constitute the events that are objects of immediate experience as the concept of history.<sup>6</sup>

The possible condition of particular historical experiences, according to Simmel, is the capacity to ascribe a meaningful value to the whole of history, in accordance with which facts are able to assume a status of historical significance. Historical knowledge therefore requires a critical ‘metaphysics of history’ which transcendently grasps ‘historical reality as a whole’.<sup>7</sup> According to Simmel this “explanans”, or Idea of the totality of history, is supplied for Marx by the concept of communism as a ‘unified entity that we cannot grasp directly...[but] prevents our construct of history from collapsing into

---

4 Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde*, (London, Verso, 1995), p.42.

5 George Simmel, *The Problems of the Philosophy of History: An Epistemological Essay*, trans. Guy Oakes, (New York, The Free Press, 1977), pp.151-202.

6 Ibid., p.3.

7 Ibid., pp.177 & 151.

incoherent splinters and fragments'.<sup>8</sup> Communism as a pure a priori but merely regulative Idea of reason therefore supplies a correlating historical form (the masses organised into classes according to economic interests) for the empirical experience of the chaotic and manifold content of life. Simmel therefore justifies historical materialism as an "epistemological *idealism*" in order to avoid the sceptical problem faced by "historical realism". It is only when it misconstrues itself as dogmatically speculative metaphysics of history that historical materialism enacts a 'premature and dogmatic foreshortening of our ontological perspective', which ascribes a sole, unique and eternal significance to the forces of production.<sup>9</sup>

Gillian Rose has rightly pointed out the enormous influence of Simmel's 'unique version of neo-Kantian *Geltungslogik* [logic of validity]' upon the 'development of critical, Marxist sociology'.<sup>10</sup> She has also pointedly criticised how the form/content dichotomy which this neo-Kantian paradigm asserts severs the ideal from the real and, in seeking to discover the conditions of possibility of an object whose existence is presupposed, remains blind to the ahistorical character of its judgement.<sup>11</sup> Significantly, by regarding communism as a merely regulative Idea, Simmel's neo-Kantianism responds to the eternalization of the present in Hegelian philosophy by turning the rationality of the future into an infinitely deferred ideal, purified of all empirical and historical content. The value of such an endeavour is in highlighting the necessity of an adequate concept of historical experience for the philosophy of history (one absent from Kant's own essays on history). Yet Rose's attempt to retrieve a Hegelian concept of speculative experience for social theory only rehearses the converse problematic assumption of the identity of the real and the rational within history, whose empirical falsification had helped expose to neo-Kantianism the tautological logic of Hegel's speculative philosophy. With each failure of the world to rationally transform itself, the problem of scepticism therefore resurfaces.

In this context, the denigration of metaphysics and the institutional 'crisis of narratives' diagnosed by Jean-François Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition* represents a retreat to a neo-Humean scepticism.<sup>12</sup> Its objection towards any project of historical

---

8 Ibid., p.187.

9 Ibid., p.188.

10 Gillian Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology*, (London, Althone, 1981), p.25.

11 Ibid., p.1.

12 Kojin Karatani's *Transcritique: On Kant and Marx* characterises the critical formalism of postmodernism as a return to the scepticism of Humean empiricism, which relinquishes the positive moral force contained in the communist project to religious fundamentalism. Whether Karatani's proposal to 'reconstruct the metaphysics called communism' through Kant succeeds in avoiding the perceived feebleness of neo-Kantian "ethical socialism" from which he distances his work remains open to question (Kojin Karatani, *Transcritique: On Kant and Marx*, trans. Sabu Kohso, (Cambridge, MA & London, MIT Press, 2005), p.xi.



totalization collapses, however, not only with the awareness of its complicity with the totalizing conditions of capitalist modernity against which it abandons any perspective for critical scrutiny, but also with the internal contradictions of its own status as a *meta*-“metanarrative”. Against this, the recent recovery of a mathematical-scientific grounding of metaphysics only repeats the route by which neo-Kantianism first flourished in the latter half of the nineteenth century and then dissipated in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>13</sup> What is necessary is the formulation of a speculative concept of historical experience, one which permits a consideration of the significance of the recent past in relation to the totality of history without drawing on either a Hegelian eternalization of the conditions of the present or the Kantian purification of reality through an endlessly deferred future.

The philosophical interest which Walter Benjamin’s concept of experience has received in the last two decades indicates the extent to which his work permits an opening up of this perspective. His thought presents a sustained philosophical engagement with the problem outlined above, to the extent that the disciplinarity of philosophy itself becomes transformed through the speculative imperative of his engagement with the ephemerality of the historical present. Two essays which emerge simultaneously from Benjamin’s stay in Moscow over the winter of 1926-7 are paradigmatic of a practical engagement with this theoretical problem of historical experience and with a hermeneutics of historical significance characterised in terms of experienceability. These works – ‘Moscow’ and ‘Goethe’ – will therefore provide a useful opening into this project, as well as specifying the perspective through which Benjamin’s philosophy will be considered in what follows. In particular, they speak of a phenomenological experience of the historical in terms of a physiognomic language of the everyday, one that that will be utilised to construct a “metacritique of the purism of historical reason”, inspired in part by George Hamann’s own metacritique of Kant’s philosophy of nature. Such metacritique seeks to transform the concept of historical experience from its rational preoccupation with knowledge to a theory of truth grounded in a speculative metaphysics of history. In doing so it counters the “idealist” tendency – prevalent in Kant and Hegel and still implicit in Marx’s concept of history – to perceive historical reality as in some

---

13 The turn to Kant in political theory from both sides of the analytic/continental divide in the 1970s and 1980s (Rawls, Arendt, Habermas, and Lyotard himself) would seem to reflect a set of complex responses to Stalinism (as well as the rehabilitation of Kantian epistemology by the analytical readings of the 1960s onwards). Karatani’s anarchism fits in with this political response, placing a value on the primacy of ethics in Kant’s philosophy which is proximate to (but not identical with) a Levinasian strand of “neo-Kantianism” continued by Simon Critchley. On the other hand, Alain Badiou’s mathematical ontology recovers a scientific impulse which dominates the neo-Kantianism of the nineteenth century, although he distances himself from this.

sense ultimately knowable. Benjamin's general turn to materialism will be read in the chapters that follow as an outcome of his rejection of the optimism of this "idealist" perspective, one that articulates in its place a materialist transformation of historical significance for experience.

Commissioned to depict everyday life under the mixed socialism of the New Economic Policy, in his two month stay in Moscow Benjamin experienced the political and cultural upheaval of the great "laboratory table" of the Soviet Union under Stalin.<sup>14</sup> He speaks of a city in which:

In schematic form, Moscow, as it appears at this very moment, reveals the full range of possibilities: above all, the possibility of the revolution's utter failure and of its success. In both instances, however, there will be something unforeseeable whose appearance will be vastly different from any programmatic painting of the future. The outline of this today is brutally and clearly present in the people and their environment.<sup>15</sup>

Benjamin's rejection of any "programmatic painting" of the future and his emphasis upon its unpredictability testify to a radically speculative concept of experience attuned to the multiplicity of virtual futures which contingently impinge upon the present, not as progressive outgrowths of its inherent tendencies but as monstrous interruptions of all expectations. These have their basis, Benjamin insists, in economic facts whose imprints are 'brutally and distinctly visible' in the phenomenological transformations of the architectural, chromatic, and temporal configurations of everyday life. He confesses, however, that 'few people, even in Russia, have a significantly broad grasp' of such facts to permit any straightforward interpretation. Extolled in the *Arcades Project* as 'the expression of the economy in its culture' (and modelled on a psycho-physical relationship of signification which is likened to that of a nightmare to a bad stomach), such expressionism is described here as a 'new and disorienting language'.<sup>16</sup>

Importantly for the study that follows, Benjamin speaks of portraying such a language according to a methodology which implicitly draws on the scientific writings of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. To capture the utter contingency of this language, Benjamin proposes a presentational form in which "all factuality is already theory" and therefore it refrains from any deductive abstraction, any prognostication, and, within

---

14 'Each thought, each day, each life lies here as on a laboratory table. And as if it were a metal from which an unknown substance is by means to be extracted, it must endure experimentation to the point of exhaustion. No organism, no organization, can escape this process' (Walter Benjamin, 'Moscow', *Selected Writings* [hereafter *SW*], Volume 1, (Cambridge, MA. & London, Harvard University Press, 1991), p.23.

15 Walter Benjamin, Letter to Martin Buber (dated February 23rd 1927), *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin: 1910-1940*, eds. Gershom Scholem & Theodor W. Adorno, (Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press, 1994), p.313.

16 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* [hereafter *AP*], trans. Howard Eiland & Kevin McLaughlin, (Cambridge, MA. & London, Belknap Press, 1999), K2,5; Walter Benjamin, Letter to Martin Buber (dated February 23rd 1927), op. cit., p.313.

certain bounds, even any judgement'.<sup>17</sup> The source of Benjamin's comment is Goethe's injunction, in *Maxims and Reflections*, 'not seek for something behind the phenomena' because 'everything in the realm of fact is already theory', and the phenomena 'themselves are the theory'.<sup>18</sup> The tender empiricism [*Zarte Empirie*] which underlies this methodology concerns itself with an experimental experience of the "archetypal", "primal" or "original" phenomenon [*Urphänomen*] which is conceived not merely as empirical facts but as the concrete convergence of truth with the real.<sup>19</sup>

Whilst Benjamin was engaged in such an "experiment" he was simultaneously preparing a biography of Goethe for the *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia* which filtered bourgeois Weimar through the lens of historical materialism.<sup>20</sup> Deemed 'too radical' for the Marxist orthodoxy of the encyclopaedia's editors, Benjamin's article introduces the "greatness" of Goethe according to a materialist theory of temporal after-life, arguing that Goethe managed to found a 'great literature' among the bourgeoisie precisely because 'his whole work abounds in reservations about them'.<sup>21</sup> Goethe gave 'the contents that fulfilled him the form which has enabled them to resist their dissolution at the hands of the bourgeoisie – a resistance made possible because they remained without effect and not because they could be deformed or trivialized'. Tender empiricism as a dialectical materialism. A materialist theory of historical afterlife. The chapters that follow seek to elaborate the genealogy of these positions within Benjamin's thought and evaluate the coherence of their relationship. Underlying them, it will be suggested, is a speculative concept of historical experience as a material medium of refraction and a theory of historical significance as metaphysical truth which circumvents the theoretical problems of both a Hegelian and neo-Kantian philosophy of history.

That the poet, scientist and statesman Johann Wolfgang von Goethe is the other pivotal figure behind the concept of historical experience which underlies this project is perhaps surprising, since Goethe's thought is typically associated with a spiritual holism and conservative cheerfulness that runs counter to the destructive melancholy of Benjamin's thought and the radicalism of the political project which this sustains. Yet the chapters that follow seek to demonstrate the presence of a powerful and sustained

---

17 Ibid.

18 J. W. von Goethe, *Maxims and Reflections* [hereafter *MR*], trans. Elisabeth Stopp, (London, Penguin Books, 1998), #430.

19 Walter Benjamin, 'Moscow', *SW2* p.22. Throughout this work, Goethe's phrase '*Zarte Empirie*' has been translated according to the standard English rendering of *zarte* as "tender", which is preferential to 'delicate' but nonetheless fails to fully capture the sensitivity inherent to this Goethean sensibility.

20 'Goethe' was commissioned but rejected by the *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia* and subsequently published in condensed form in *Die literarische Welt* in December 1928. 'Moscow' was published in Martin Buber's journal *Die Kreatur* in 1927.

21 Walter Benjamin, 'Goethe', *SW2* p.187.

Goetheanism across the whole of Benjamin's writings. Preceding both the early study of Early German Romanticism and the subsequent engagement with Marxism – aspects according to which his work is frequently categorized – this Goetheanism provides the standpoint for his critical and often unorthodox appropriations of these positions. Whilst Benjamin's earliest writings uncritically draw on Goethe's reading of George Hamann to articulate a theory of cultural and spiritual fragmentation – one which comes to be replaced by a historical materialist account of capitalist estrangement – Benjamin retains a number of key ideas extracted from Goethe's philosophy of nature and reformulated within the context of a materialist philosophy of history. If, as will be argued, such a Goetheanism is a central part of Benjamin's philosophy of history, the viability of the concept of historical experience which it produces is dependent upon the extent to which it can be philosophically theorised without contradicting the historical materialism of Benjamin's mature politics.

It is technology – specifically the photographic and later cinematographic image – which comes to mediate between Goethe's natural philosophy and a materialist theory of culture in Benjamin's later thought. In this respect, the argument developed through the course of this work is that Goethe's tender empiricism should be conceived as proto-constructivist, on the model of avant-garde art practice. This will be tested in the final chapter through a consideration of Benjamin's appropriation of Jungian psychology in the early notes of the Arcades Project. It is here that the stakes of Benjamin's Goetheanism differentiate him most clearly from the predominantly Freudian cultural critique of Adorno and the Frankfurt School. But this also draws him into the problematic orbit of fascist ideology, from which he would only be able to emerge through a sustained critique of the undialectical naturalism of Jung's own deployment of Goethe. Since this critique was never completed, the coherence and legacy of Benjamin's Goetheanism stands in need of an evaluation which occupies the conclusion of this investigation.

The Jungian motifs in Benjamin's work from the late 1920s and early 1930s have been subject to – mainly dismissive – scrutiny in a number of recent commentaries. Sarah Ley Roff offers a survey of this recent literature upon Benjamin's relation to psychoanalysis and to Jungian psychology in 'Benjamin and Psychoanalysis', and Sigrid Weigel's "re-reading" of Benjamin in 'Body- and Image-Space' in particular emphasises the former, whilst bluntly insisting that 'Benjamin's talk of the "unconscious of the collective" has nothing to do' with 'Jung's model of the "collective unconscious"'.<sup>22</sup>

---

22 Sarah Ley Roff, 'Benjamin and Psychoanalysis', *The Cambridge Companion to Walter Benjamin*, ed. David S. Ferris, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp.115-132; cf. Sigrid Weigel, *Body- and Image-Space: Re-Reading Walter Benjamin*, (London & New York, Routledge, 1996), pp.120-127.

Similarly, both Ned Lukacher's presentation of Benjamin as a theorist of "chthonic revolution" and more recently Michael Hollington's interest in the chthonic roots which situate Benjamin "between Marx and Fourier" play down the importance of Jung to this project.<sup>23</sup> Most commentators consent with Lukacher's evaluation, that 'Benjamin was never terribly interested in Jung's work' and that 'he was genuinely convinced by Adorno's celebration of Freud'.<sup>24</sup> However, Benjamin's critical relationship to Jung can only be properly situated within the context of his similarly critical appropriation of Goethe's thought. When this is understood, it is less surprising that Benjamin's socio-psychological model for the interpretation of collective dreams – itself a critique of vulgar Marxist determinism – drew him into the proximity of Jung's own critique of Freudian psychoanalysis, if we recognize the importance of Goethe within an alternative and esoteric tradition of the unconscious represented by Jung and more recently Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari.<sup>25</sup>

Given the divergence in the current intellectual standing of both thinkers, it is to be expected that Jungians are more enthusiastic about Benjamin's cultural theory than critical theorists are about analytical psychology (although the recent emergence of "post-Jungian" psychology represents a critical re-engagement with the substance of Jung's thought, echoed in recent philosophical publications on Jung and, variously, Deleuze, Irigaray, Kant, Nietzsche, and postmodernity).<sup>26</sup> Terence Dawson, co-editor of the

---

23 Michael Hollington, 'Benjamin, Fourier, Barthes', *With The Sharpened Axe of Reason: Approaches to Walter Benjamin*, ed. Gerhard Fischer, (Oxford & Herndon, Va., Berg, 1994), p.119; Ned Lukacher, 'Walter Benjamin's Chthonian Revolution', *boundary 2*, Vol. 11, No. 1/2, Engagements: Postmodernism, Marxism, Politics, (Autumn, 1982/Winter, 1983), pp.49-50.

24 Ibid., p.49.

25 cf. the discussion of Jung's Goetheanism in Chapter 4. This reading of Benjamin's quasi-Jungian cultural materialism might therefore be critically compared to the literary theory of the British Marxist Christopher Caudwell, whose pre-emptive constellation of psychoanalysis, Jung and Marx is described by one commentator as the 'Ghost of Marxism's Future' (Edwin A. Roberts, *The Anglo-Marxists: A Study in Ideology and Culture*, (Maryland & Oxford, Rowman and Littlefield, 1997), pp.95-6. For a more critical appraisal of Caudwell's theoretical accomplishments cf. Francis Mulhern, 'The Marxist Aesthetics of Christopher Caudwell', *New Left Review*, 1, 85 (May-June, 1974). Roberts mistakenly attributes this article to "Francis Mulber" in his short coda (Edwin A. Roberts, op. cit., p.102).

Christian Kerslake's *Deleuze and the Unconscious* examines Deleuze's critical opposition to Freudian psychoanalysis (most notably in *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus* with Felix Guattari) and his relationship to this alternative tradition of the unconscious. Whilst Kerslake places both Deleuze's and Jung's "differential" theory of the unconscious within 'a tradition of thought about the unconscious which is older than Freud's and rooted in the philosophical tradition', his work does not discuss Goethe's relation to this tradition or Deleuze's philosophical relation to Goethe (Christian Kerslake, *Deleuze and the Unconscious*, (London & New York, Continuum, 2007), p.3). One of the undeveloped suppositions of my own project is that Goethe might prove to be a mediating figure in a staged encounter between Benjamin and Deleuze's philosophies.

26 cf. Christian Kerslake, *Deleuze and the Unconscious*, op. cit.; Frances Gray, *Jung, Irigaray, Individuation: Philosophy, Analytical Psychology, and the Question of the Feminine*, (Hove & New York, Routledge, 2007); Paul Bishop, *Synchronicity Intuition in Kant, Swedenborg, and*

Cambridge Companion to Jung, suggests Jung's analysis of the cultural reception of Joyce's *Ulysses* 'anticipates some of the work of Walter Benjamin and other members of the Frankfurt School', because Jung recognised 'the ambivalent face of modernity that both challenges and changes us' and how 'we cannot wrestle with the contemporary without wrestling with all the conflicting tensions that make up the past, because all the different tensions of the past are still with us'.<sup>27</sup> One of the ideas developed in the final chapter is that this aspect of Jung's thought derives from an emphasis upon "nature" as a congealed, material substrate of the historical which is shared with Goethe's concept of experience and which resonates with the unorthodox materialism of Benjamin's later thought. As already suggested, however, this materialism needs to be historicized and brought into a relation with historical materialism through a mediating concept of technology. This is performed across the chapters that follow through a discussion of a radicalized understanding of genius that draws upon Kant, Goethe, Plato, Jung and Benjamin, and aspects of the artistic practices of Russian Constructivism and early modern cinema.

Benjamin's philosophical relationship to Goethe is less contentious and frequently remarked upon, but has to my knowledge not received any specific and full-length investigation in English. Bernd Witte, Uwe Steiner (in German), Joanna Hodge, John Pizer, Esther Leslie and Andrew Benjamin (in English) have, however, devoted sections of their work to exploring this relationship.<sup>28</sup> One of the themes which arises out of a number of these reflections is how the presence of a Goethean metaphysics of experience in Benjamin's work distances his messianism from the messianicity of Derrida's deconstructive philosophy. Joanna Hodge, for example, introduces a distinction between the weak messianism of Benjamin's interpretation of Early German Romanticism and the strong aesthetics of his reading of Goethe, arguing that the 'key to his admiration for Goethe' lies in the possibility of recasting the 'constitutive categories' of the former

---

*Jung*, (Lewiston, NY. & Lampeter, E. Mellen Press, 2000), Paul Bishop, *The Dionysian Self: C. G. Jung's Reception of Friedrich Nietzsche*, (Berlin, de Gruyter, 1995); Raya A. Jones, *Jung, Psychology, Postmodernity*, (Hove & New York, Routledge, 2007).

27 Terence Dawson, 'Literary Criticism and Analytical Psychology', *The Cambridge Companion to Jung*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp.278-9).

28 Bernd Witte, 'Die Aktualität des Klassikers. Walter Benjamin und Goethe', *Studie Germanici* (nuova serie), 40, 3, (2002); Uwe Steiner, "'Zarte Empirie": Überlegungen zum Verhältnis von Urphänomen und Ursprung im Früh- und Spätwerk Walter Benjamins', *Antike und Moderne: Zu Walter Benjamins Passagen*, ed. Richard Faber, (Würzburg, Norbert W. Bolz, 1986); Joanna Hodge, 'The Timing of Elective Affinity: Walter Benjamin's Strong Aesthetics', *Walter Benjamin and Art*, ed. Andrew Benjamin, (London & New York, Continuum, 2005); John Pizer, 'Goethe's "Urphänomen" and Benjamin's "Ursprung": A Reconsideration', *Seminar*, 25, 3, (1989) & *Towards a Theory of Radical Origin*, (Lincoln, Nebraska, University of Nebraska Press, 1995); Esther Leslie, *Hollywood Flatlands: Animation, Critical Theory and the Avant-Garde*, (London & New York, Verso, 2002), pp.252-274; Andrew Benjamin, *Philosophy's Literature*, (Manchester, Clinamen, 2001), pp.11-13.

‘independently from any endorsement of one true religion, Christianity’.<sup>29</sup> This, she claims, counterpoises Benjamin’s messianic theology without religion to the ‘messianicity without messianism’ of what she terms Derrida’s ‘religion with theology’.<sup>30</sup> It is unclear whether Hodge intends to evoke Benjamin’s own use of this phrase as a description of the mythic temporality of capitalism in order to criticise Derrida, but the argument developed across the following chapters is that Benjamin introduces the mortuary aspect of Goethe’s theory of judgement into the positivity of Romantic criticism in order to theorize a speculative metaphysical experience of completed totality and this implies that the omission of such an aspect risks rehearsing the problematic temporality of novelty that is inherent to capitalism. This idea – which suggests what is at stake in Benjamin’s Goethean reception for the debates between postmodernity and modernity mentioned above, as well as what is to be demanded of any contemporary recuperation of Romanticism within Marxist and post-Marxist philosophy – is explored in my last two chapters.

The chapters that follow therefore intend to explain Benjamin’s recourse to this implicit Goetheanism and to the kind of cognition and presentation involved in such a practice. Part of the argument to be developed in such consideration is that Goethe’s work permits Benjamin to re-conceive his transformed Kantianism as a transcendental empiricism of the pure material content of experience. In Chapter 1, the philosophical basis and historical genealogy of Benjamin’s project is explored via his early metacritique of the Kantian and neo-Kantian philosophy of history and the scientifically impoverished concept of experience which he seeks to overcome. Hermann Cohen’s recognition of a scientific theory of experience underlying Kant’s system is important in this respect, although Benjamin does not follow Cohen’s legitimization of such experience by endorsing a logical idealism of pure cognition.

The transcendental theory of experience which supports Benjamin’s overcoming of Kant’s limitations is developed, Chapter 2 argues, through a consideration of Early German Romanticism but also Goethe’s tender empiricism. The latter, it will be argued, provides a more coherent resource for Benjamin’s development of a materialist theory of Ideas, since Goethe’s concept of experience – in contrast to Romantic self-reflection – involves an “objective” thinking in which the object is absorbed into thought, leaving traces of material residue or “after-images”. This is explored in the concluding section of the chapter in relation to the specific material ontology of the photographic image, a

---

29 Joanna Hodge, op. cit., p.20.

30 Jacques Derrida, ‘Marx and Sons’, *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida’s Spectres of Marx*, (London & New York, Verso, 1999), p.250; Joanna Hodge, op. cit., p.18

theme that is picked up again in Chapter 3 in relation to the moving- or cinematographic [*kinesis*] image.

Chapter 3 examines the dialectical structure of Goethe's concept of experience in relation to the philosophy of history, exploring its characteristically refractive medium in relation to colour, phantasy and language. The relation between the hermeneutic incompleteness of the lived moment and the existential completion intimated by death that arises from this structure is then examined in relation to Benjamin's messianic understanding of history by considering the question of historical judgement.

Having examined the resources for a materialist and a dialectical philosophy of experience in Benjamin's Goetheanism, the final chapter critically examines their conjunction in the dialectical materialism which Benjamin's develops as a critique of Marxism. The development of an "expressive materialism" offers a criticism of vulgar historical materialism, it is argued, by drawing upon a Jungian theory of dream symbolism which transposes the existential crisis within psychosis into a collective ideology of historical catastrophe. Despite the inherent problems of its theory of collective archetypes, Jung's psychological critique of Freudian dream symbolism provides a legitimate intellectual resource for Benjamin's concept of the phantasmagoria because Benjamin's appropriation of Jung takes place within the context of a Goethean dialectic of semblance. The chapter concludes with a critique of Jung's archaic image, missing from Benjamin's own writings, by way of an interpretation of the role of technology in Goethe's *Faust*.



# 1. The Neo-Kantian Problematic:

## Walter Benjamin and the Metaphysics of Experience

*We know of primitive peoples of the so-called pre-animistic stage who identify themselves with sacred animals and plants and name themselves after them; we know of insane people who likewise identify themselves in part with objects of their perception, which are thus no longer objecta, "placed before" them...*

– Walter Benjamin, 'On the Program of the Coming Philosophy'

### 1.1 Speculative Experience and the Possibility of Metaphysics in Kant

Walter Benjamin's essay 'The Life of Students', published in *Der neue Merkur* in 1915, encapsulates what is at stake for the philosophy of history in the attempt to formulate a more radical concept of experience, an awareness of which accompanies all of his subsequent thought. Opposing his position to a 'view of history that puts its faith in the infinite extent of time and thus concerns itself only with the speed, or lack of it, with which people and epochs advance along the path of progress', the essay implies that such a perspective produces a conception of the present as always necessarily incomplete and of the future as the inevitable extension of its implicit but 'formless progressive tendencies'.<sup>1</sup> It is a view of history which produces that "grim" and "overwhelming" concept of experience as 'expressionless, impenetrable, and ever the same'.<sup>2</sup> Written in the context of Benjamin's involvement in the "Free Students' Association" of the German Youth Movement, this concept of experience is opposed for endorsing a form of cultural conservatism which is at best cynically patronising and at worst the prop of a reactionary philistinism.

Despite the political necessity for opposing this view, however, Benjamin's writings up to 1916 are only able to formulate an alternative through recourse to a concept of spiritual experience drawn mainly from the poetry of Schiller, Hölderlin and Stefan George. The idea of "youth" and its "dreams" is allied with a uncritically metaphysical notion of spiritual experience in Benjamin's earliest texts which is problematically nostalgic ('We were [*once*] accustomed to spirit [*Geist*] just as we are accustomed to the heartbeat that enables us to lift loads and digest our food') and idealistically utopian.<sup>3</sup> From the perspective of the critical philosophy which shortly

---

1 Walter Benjamin, 'The Life of Students' [hereafter *LS*], *SWI* p.37.

2 Walter Benjamin, 'Experience', *SWI* p.3.

3 Walter Benjamin, 'The Metaphysics of Youth', *SWI* p.6. Benjamin's conclusion to 'The Metaphysics of Youth' appeals to a paradisiacal time and space of the Ball which appears capable of seeping into the grim realities of the outside world: 'We know that all the merciless realities that have been expelled still flutter around this house...From time to time, music penetrates to the outside world and submerges them'. It is the blend of Taoist mysticism and German humanism promoted by Martin Buber's writings that seem to underlie this idea of a spiritual utopia. An earlier quotation from the Lao Tzu invokes the famous utopian image of a

comes to preoccupy Benjamin's writings, this metaphysical concept of experience is problematically dogmatic in its invocation of spiritual 'values – inexperienceable – which we serve'.<sup>4</sup> For this reason, it is important to articulate the possibility of such a speculative concept of experience through a philosophical engagement with the metaphysics of history from within Kant's critical system, one that begins with a consideration of the problem of metaphysics in general.

The *Critique of Pure Reason* which inaugurated transcendental idealism in 1781 establishes the critical limitations of epistemology by cautioning against the inherent tendency of idealism since Plato for metaphysical flights of speculation. Kant warns how 'Plato left the world of sense because it sets such narrow limits to our understanding; on the wings of the ideas, he ventured beyond that world and into the empty space of pure understanding. He did not notice that with all his efforts he made no headway'.<sup>5</sup> For, 'it is human reason's usual fate, in speculation, to finish its edifice as soon as possible, and not to inquire until afterwards whether a good foundation has in fact been laid for it'. Benjamin will, like much of neo-Kantianism before him, attempt to overcome the limitations imposed within Kant's system through a partial return to the speculative metaphysics of Plato. He regards Kant's resistance to such a metaphysics as serving two central purposes: 'to guarantee the certainty of our knowledge of nature and above all to secure the integrity of ethics'.<sup>6</sup> That is, Kant sought to recover the possibility of scientific knowledge and of ethical experience through the discovery of pure a priori concepts, and this was achieved through the separation of a theoretical and a practical reason. In doing so, the certainty of a theoretical knowledge could be guaranteed precisely through its separation from speculative experience, and the recuperation of ethics secured through its independence from the empirical. This allowed Kant to produce a valid 'metaphysics of nature' in which he 'described that part of the natural sciences which is pure – that is, proceeds not from experience but simply from reason a priori' (*P* 93). The 'Copernican revolution' of the transcendental method therefore accounts for what in our experience of nature is necessary, by attributing its necessity to theoretical reason itself.

But having secured a metaphysics of nature on the basis of the structure of knowledge itself, Kant's epistemology now risks turning into the very speculative

---

land where, 'The next place might be so near at hand/ That one could hear the cocks crowing in it.../ But the people would grow old and die/ Without ever having been there' (Walter Benjamin, 'The Metaphysics of Youth', *SWI* p.10). Benjamin inverts this scene in the final section: the utopian music of the Ball drowns out the sounds of the outside world which lies so near at hand.

4 Walter Benjamin, 'Experience', *SWI* p.4.

5 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar, (Indianapolis, Hackett, 1996), *Ak.* A5/B9.

6 Walter Benjamin, 'On Perception' [hereafter *P*], *SWI* p.93.

rationalism that it positioned itself against. The continuity established between thought and experience entailed that ‘the *metaphysics* of nature could easily collapse into the concept of experience’ (*ibid.*). That is, the structure of reality itself might be deducible from certain necessary principles of knowledge possessed by a subject implicated in actively producing such a world. Benjamin maintains that, ‘Kant feared nothing so much as this abyss,’ and that the systematic development of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is structured around the avoidance of this metaphysical problem. ‘His method,’ Benjamin argues, ‘was not only to relate all knowledge to nature, as well as the metaphysics of nature, to space and time as constitutive concepts, but to distinguish these concepts absolutely from the categories’. Kant deliberately separated the a priori intuitions of sensibility from the categories of understanding in response to this metaphysical problem: ‘This meant that from the outset he avoided a unified epistemological centre whose all-too-powerful gravitational force might have sucked all experience into itself’ (P 93-4).

Kant posits the faculty of the understanding as providing the formal pure a priori concepts – the categories – through which the content of “experience” is schematised, distinct from the pure a priori intuitions of space and time through which the manifold given to sensibility is synthesised, by distinguishing the Transcendental Aesthetic of the first *Critique* from the Transcendental Logic. This, in Benjamin’s view, unwarranted distinction explains the necessity for retaining a minimal but uncognizable a posteriori “given”. The “material of sensation” was artificially distanced from the animating centre of the categories by the forms of intuition by which it was only imperfectly absorbed’ (P 94.). Kant is therefore able to introduce a check or critical limit with which to resist speculative deduction: the requirement that the ‘flights of fancy’ of the understanding be grounded upon intuitability. In this way, ‘Kant achieved the separation of metaphysics and experience, or, to use his own terms, between pure knowledge and experience’. Theoretical knowledge guarantees its certainty by being initially distinguished from, but then tied back to, the sensibility of experience. The speculative crux of Benjamin’s project will be the undoing of this separation in order to permit a mediation between metaphysics and experience.

## 1.2 The Neo-Kantian Problematic: Trendelenburg, Fischer and Cohen

In the half-century after the death of Kant, German philosophy witnessed a Hegelian reinvigoration of a speculative idealism whose historical limitations eventually produced a ‘mistrust and a feeling of “nausea” for philosophical speculation’.<sup>7</sup> In the wake of the perceived collapse of Hegelianism by the mid-eighteen hundreds, and motivated by the

---

7 Andrea Poma, *The Critical Philosophy of Hermann Cohen* [hereafter *HC*], (Albany, SUNY, 1997), p.1.

success of empirical research in the positive sciences – which now threatened to leave philosophy idling behind with its dream of speculative metaphysics – the preoccupation with epistemology [*Erkenntnistheorie*] intensified, reaching its climax with the famous refrain from Otto Liebmann's 1865 text *Kant and his Epigones*: 'Thus we must go back to Kant [*Also muß auf Kant zurückgegangen werden*]' (HC 1).

Because the eruption of the debate between the Kantian epistemology of Adolf Trendelenburg and the neo-Hegelianism of Kuno Fischer in the 1860s arose over the specific issue of the philosophical status of the pure forms of intuition in the Transcendental Aesthetic and the more general problem of validity of Kant's minimal version of metaphysics, it will prove a useful starting point for our enquiry. Trendelenburg's criticism of the *Critique of Pure Reason* revolves around the recognition of a "neglected alternative" to Kant's claim, in the Transcendental Aesthetic, that 'space and time are *either* forms of sensibility *or* real existences'.<sup>8</sup> For Trendelenburg, 'even if we concede the argument that space and time are demonstrated to be subjective conditions which, in us, precede perception and experience, there is still no word of proof to show that they cannot at the same time be objective forms'.<sup>9</sup> If Trendelenburg's argument is correct, it would expose Kant's ontological denial of the spatio-temporality of things-in-themselves as itself dogmatically metaphysical. Furthermore, at stake in Trendelenburg's intervention is his belief that if space is demonstrated to be an exclusively subjective condition of our cognition of objects it would undermine the very possibility of scientific realism, since the natural sciences would only ever be capable of investigating the lawfulness of supposedly mere appearances.

Fischer rightly criticises Trendelenburg for misunderstanding the difference between transcendental and empirical ideality in Kant, and therefore for falsely conflating subjectivity per se with an empirical psychological subjectivity. As Graham Bird points out, Fischer 'represents Kant's position more accurately' by arguing that 'space and time are empirically objective (empirically real) but transcendently subjective (not transcendently real)'.<sup>10</sup> In other words, they possess a metaphysical reality according to Kant's critical conception of metaphysics, but not a speculative "metaphysics" concerning thing-in-themselves. But Trendelenburg's broader concern with realism demands a justification for Kant's imposed agnosticism towards the things-in-themselves, and therefore the grounds for the very distinction between the transcendental and the

---

8 Sebastian Gardner, *Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason*, (London & New York, Routledge, 1999), p.107.

9 Adolf Trendelenburg, *Logische Untersuchungen*, (Leipzig, S. Herzel, 1862), p.163, trans. Sebastian Gardner, op.cit., p.107.

10 Graham Bird, 'The Neglected Alternative: Trendelenburg, Fischer, and Kant', *A Companion to Kant*, ed. Graham Bird, (Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), p.493.

empirical within the Transcendental Aesthetic in the first place. Whilst Fischer insists that this distinction is necessary, since it is the transcendental status of space and time as purely formal conditions by which all objects are knowable to us which guarantees their universality – and therefore the mathematical “objectivity” of the positive sciences – Trendelenburg correctly raises the ambiguity of their unique transcendental status in the first *Critique*.

This controversy over the possibility of a critical metaphysics of nature within Kant’s transcendental idealism echoes the debates over the scientific status of the social sciences and humanities also invoked by the neo-Kantians in the latter half of the nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup> If time as a pure form of intuition in the Aesthetic is dogmatically metaphysical, this undermines the very status of history as a discipline of scientific enquiry which imposes historical narratives onto events, and therefore the possibility of even a critical metaphysics of history.<sup>12</sup> However, it is Hermann Cohen’s intervention in the neo-Kantian dispute – initially in the essay ‘On the Controversy Between Trendelenburg and Kuno Fischer’ (1871), and its subsequent development into the longer work on *Kant’s Theory of Experience* (1871) – which is significant for the Benjaminian project of a metaphysics of history, because in his attempt to resolve the disagreement between Trendelenburg and Fischer he reverses the terms of the inquiry and therefore the meaning of a priority in Kant’s transcendental philosophy. The value of such an argument for the project at hand will lie not in the resulting “critical idealism”, but for rethinking the relationship between the Transcendental Aesthetic and the Transcendental Logic in Kant’s first *Critique* according to a theory of experience which permits a mediation across the artificial abyss imposed upon the architectonic.

It is Cohen’s thought that serves as the frequent backdrop from which Benjamin’s own arguments develop, and his acquaintance, admiration, and disappointment with aspects of Cohen’s work is documented in Gershom Scholem’s biography of their friendship.<sup>13</sup> In his early essays ‘On Perception’ and ‘On the Program of the Coming

---

11 Any generic reference to neo-Kantianism should remain conscious of the different philosophical projects not only between the Marburg school and the South-Western school, but between individual thinkers within those schools. Whilst I follow Benjamin’s own generic references to “neo-Kantianism” here, for reasons that are explained below this chapter will examine Benjamin’s critical relationship to neo-Kantianism through the work of Hermann Cohen in particular.

12 Simmel’s consideration of the metaphysics of history considered in the Preface above is troubled by a similar spectre of scepticism, and he too attempts to resolve this debate in terms of a tension between a historical realist and an epistemological idealist interpretation of the status of historical materialism.

13 Cf. Gershom Scholem, *Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship*, trans. Harry Zohn, (New York, New York Review Books, 1981), p.74. This backdrop is notable in the early fragments ‘On Perception’ (1917) and ‘On the Program of the Coming Philosophy’ (1918), in the essays on ‘Goethe’s Elective Affinities’ (published 1924-5), the ‘Critique of Violence’ (published

Philosophy' from 1917-18, Benjamin regards the redevelopment of the Kantian system as a philosophical task which, having been partially initiated by neo-Kantianism, was to be completed by the proposed 'coming philosophy'. Under the changed political circumstances of the 1930s, the difference in tone of Benjamin's 1939 overview of neo-Kantianism in a review of Hönigswald's *Philosophy and Language* might be interpreted not so much as hostility at the betrayal of his teachers (Rickert had taught Benjamin, along with Heidegger, at the University of Freiburg in 1913) but disillusionment at the failure of neo-Kantianism to follow through such a transformation, and its subsequent complicity with the forces of bourgeois fascism. Whilst Cohen's hope for a historical reconciliation of Judaism and German humanism may have appeared naïve in 1917, for example, his words take on a tragic irony in the light of the political events of the 1930s.<sup>14</sup>

Although Benjamin proposes the transformation of Kantian philosophy beyond what he later calls the narrower aims of Kant's 'epigones', and thus beyond the limitations of Cohen's own critical idealism, understanding the sources from which Benjamin's philosophical project develops remains of central importance to comprehending the programmatic philosophical intentions of Benjamin's thought. That such a trajectory has remained relatively obscured until recently may in part be accounted for by the historical circumstances surrounding the decline of neo-Kantianism: in the aftermath of the First World War there was little appetite for a continuation of the perceived pre-war "institutions" and, having established itself as the prevailing orthodoxy, neo-Kantianism was unable 'to propagate itself institutionally into the next generation'; additionally, the rise of anti-Semitism in the inter-war period lead to the

---

1921), the 'Epistemo-Critical Prologue' to the book on baroque drama (published 1928), the 'Review of Hönigswald' (submitted for publication in 1939, but unpublished in Benjamin's lifetime), and most famously in Benjamin's critique of the "endless task" in his theses 'On The Concept of History' (1940). It is clear that Benjamin was familiar with at least Cohen's books on *Kant's Theory of Experience*, the *Aesthetic of Pure Feeling*, and with *Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism* (cf. Gillian Rose, 'Walter Benjamin – Out of the Sources of Modern Judaism', *Judaism and Modernity*, (Oxford, Blackwell, 1993), p.177, n.12; Bernd Witte, *Walter Benjamin: An Intellectual Biography*, trans. James Rolleston, (Detroit, Wayne State, 1991), pp.42 & 52-54).

- 14 Cohen saw in the original 'destruction of the Jewish state' a messianic teleology, such that 'I must leave it to my own country to bring about, within the profusion of its other moral goals, the realization of my endeavours and hopes for my religion and its followers all over the world' (Hermann Cohen, 'The German & Jewish Ethos II', *Reason and Hope*, trans. Eva Jospe, (New York, Norton, 1973), p.185). Cohen uncritically endorses Kant's philosophy of history when he claims that the 'German ethos must become the central force of such a federation which will establish world peace...[and hence] a just war is the preparation for perpetual peace' (Hermann Cohen, 'The German & Jewish Ethos I', *Reason and Hope*, op. cit. p.183). Thus, 'the spirit informing pure religion is more akin to the German spirit than to that of any other people. Hence, we German adherents of Jewish monotheism place our trust in history, confident that our innermost kinship to the German ethos will be acknowledged ever more willingly and frankly. Sustained by this confidence, we shall thus go on as German men and German citizens and at the same time remain unshakeably loyal to our Jewish religion' (Hermann Cohen, 'Judaism's Relevance for Modern Man', *Reason and Hope*, op. cit., p.220).

dispersal of key Jewish figures in the neo-Kantian tradition, many of whom died in exile having failed to make any impact in the English-speaking world.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, the philosophical value in unearthing and explicating the Kantian and neo-Kantian origins of Benjamin's critical philosophy has been testified by several recent and important studies.<sup>16</sup> In contrast to Howard Caygill's *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience* – the most prolonged examination of the Kantian origins of Benjamin's early thought to date – the discussion that follows will recognise the positive as well as negative importance of Cohen's philosophy for the young Benjamin.

### 1.3 Hermann Cohen and Kant's Theory of Experience

The preoccupation with the possibility of knowledge that characterises Trendelenburg and Fischer's epistemological [*Erkenntnis-theorie*] approach is initially jettisoned in

---

15 Alan Kim, 'Paul Natorp', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, n. 23, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/natorp/> (accessed 25/09/09). Heidegger's famous victory at the Davos seminar in the spring of 1929, in which he explicitly attacked the neo-Kantianism of Hermann Cohen and Ernst Cassirer, seemingly confirms this perspective. But this "triumph" may also be complicated by recognising in Heidegger's position the neo-Kantian influences of his own tutor, Heinrich Rickert, and of the "primordial" neo-Kantianism of Emil Lask, as well as by Franz Rosenzweig's assertion that it was not Cassirer, but Heidegger who best furthered the *spirit* of Cohen's thought (cf. Gabriel Motzkin, 'Emil Lask and the Crisis of Neo-Kantianism. The Rediscovery of the Primordial World', *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, Volume 94, No. 2, (April-June 1989), pp.173 & 176-7); Franz Rosenzweig, 'Vertauschte Fronten', *Gesammelte Schriften*, III, (Dordrecht, Martinus Nijhoff, 1984), pp.235-7). For more on the implications of the Davos dispute for Cohen's neo-Kantianism, cf. Gillian Rose, 'Hermann Cohen: Kant among the Prophets', *Judaism and Modernity: Philosophical Essays*, (Oxford, Blackwell, 1993); Alan Kim, op. cit.). Yet the quasi-mythical resonance this encounter still holds testifies to the extent to which the neo-Kantian sources out of which much post-war German philosophy critically developed were occluded in the search for such an inaugural historical break.

In his biography, Gershom Scholem notes a late 1917 polemic against Hermann Cohen, 'initiated by a lady, in the journal *Kant-Studien*, which betokened a nationalistic and mild but unmistakable anti-Semitic orientation on the part of certain neo-Kantians' (Gershom Scholem op.cit., p.60). Prominent Jewish neo-Kantians included Hermann Cohen, Ernst Cassirer, Emil Lask, Jonas Cohn, Siegfried Marck, and Richard Hönigswald, of whom Lask was killed in action in 1915 and the others died in exile (cf. Alan Kim, op. cit). Only Cassirer managed to have an impact outside of Germany in his lifetime, although this situation is being rectified in the case of Hermann Cohen with a number of recent English publications (cf. the discussion of the reception of Cohen's philosophy in Andrea Poma, 'Hermann Cohen: A Philosophical Classic?', *Yearning for Form and Other Essays on Herman Cohen's Thought*, (Dordrecht, The Netherlands, Springer, 2006); Kenneth Seethskin, 'Jewish Neo-Kantianism: Hermann Cohen', *History of Jewish Philosophy*, Routledge History of World Philosophies, Vol. II, (London & New York, Routledge, 2003)). Both Heinrich Rickert and Bruno Bauch, however, were at least complicit with the established Nazism, and the relationship between neo-Kantianism and the "Jewish Question" around the First World War was also complicated by, for example, Cohen's endorsement of German nationalism as congenial to Judaic rational monotheism.

16 In particular, Howard Caygill, *The Colour of Experience*, (London & New York, Routledge, 1998); Rudolphe Gasché, 'Objective Diversions: On Some Kantian Themes in Benjamin's "Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"', *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy: Destruction and Experience*, eds. Andrew Benjamin & Peter Osborne, (London & New York, Routledge, 1994); Nikolaus Lambrianou, 'Neo-Kantianism and messianism: origin and interruption in Hermann Cohen and Walter Benjamin', *Walter Benjamin: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory*, ed. Peter Osborne, (Abingdon & New York, Routledge, 2005), Volume 1.

Cohen's own epistemo-critical [Erkenntnis-kritik] starting point. Hence, whilst Cohen had been a student of Trendelenburg's at the University of Berlin, the critical edge of his response to Trendelenburg's interpretation of Kant resulted in the rejection of his work, *Kant's Theory of Experience*, when it was submitted as a *Habilitationsschrift* in Berlin.<sup>17</sup> Trendelenburg's insistence on the necessity of the neglected alternative implies the "subjective" status of space and time refers to merely psychological conditions of a cognizing subject. Trendelenburg begins – Cohen argues – with the question, 'Is the nature of things grounded in the conditions of our mind?', and resists the skeptical implications of this specific formulation by insisting on the neglected alternative that space and time are *both* ideal *and* real of the things-in-themselves outside of their appearance for us. Rejecting Trendelenburg's attempt to psychologise the Kantian faculties, and therefore his attempted solution, Cohen claims that the 'meaning and value of the Kantian doctrines of space and time' instead provide 'another way of enquiring into the principle of knowledge', one that now begins with the non-psychological question: 'must and can our thought be confirmed by the laws of nature?'.<sup>18</sup>

The ground of Cohen's intervention into the Trendelenburg-Fischer controversy, then, concerns not so much the status of space and time themselves but the proper meaning of Kant's transcendental method. Hence, Cohen declares the aim of his *Kant* book 'to establish Kant's theory of a priority on a new basis', specifically the discovery of the a priori character of knowledge as *producing* its experience (*KTE* iii, *HC* 8). By emphasising the 'laws of nature' (i.e. the only possible metaphysics of nature within the critical philosophy), Cohen begins from the epistemological certainty acquired in Kant's transcendental idealism on the basis of scientific knowledge. '[O]ne can start off from the physiology of the senses, or from pure psychology, from metaphysics in its ancient meaning, or from *that* metaphysics which is known as the theoretical science of nature', Cohen points out, but anyone 'who does not feel at home in Kant's *Transcendental Aesthetic* will lose his bearings at speculative crossroads'.<sup>19</sup> By 'The Principle of the

---

17 Cf. Lydia Patton, *Hermann Cohen's History and Philosophy of Science*, PhD Thesis, McGill University, 2004, p.12. This rejection forced Cohen to habilitate instead at the University of Marburg under the more sympathetic supervision of Friedrich Albert Lange. Following Lange's death in 1875, Cohen was appointed to his professorship, and in the following decades Cohen published the *System der Philosophie*, which became the 'cornerstones of the Marburg School of neo-Kantianism': the 'Logik der reinen Erkenntnis' (1902), 'Ethik des reinen Willens' (1904), and the 'Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls' (1912). A further key text, *Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism* was written following his departure from Marburg to the Institute of Judaism in Berlin in 1912 and published posthumously in 1919 following Cohen's death the year before (cf. Lydia Patton, op. cit., p.13).

18 Hermann Cohen, *Kants Theories der Erfahrung* [hereafter *KTE*], (Dümmler, Berlin, 1877), p.229, trans. *HC* p.52.

19 Hermann Cohen, 'Zur Kontroverse zwischen Trendelenburg und Kuno Fischer', *Schriften zur Philosophie und Zeitgeschichte*, 1 Bde. (Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 1928), p.230, trans. *HC* p.6.



Infinitesimal Method and its History: A Chapter on the Foundation of *Erkenntniskritik*, written in the intervening period between the first and second editions of *Kant's Theory of Experience*, Cohen is presenting his “epistemo-critical idealism [*Erkenntniskritisch Idealismus*]” according to a tradition of scientific idealism extending from Plato through Leibniz to Kant, and for which ‘idealism as a critique of knowledge has *scientific facts* as its objects, not things and not events, *not even those of simple consciousness*’.<sup>20</sup>

Cohen’s development beyond Kant is to insist that the epistemological certainty of facts of science is dependent on some ‘foregoing rational structure’ which Cohen reclassifies as an a priori ‘productive synthesis’.<sup>21</sup> He therefore seeks to preserve the objective status of “facts” by insisting not merely on the passive forms of sensibility, but on the active production of the scientific-logical experience itself. We ‘become aware of natural laws...through a *synthetic* process of reasoning,’ Cohen argues, ‘and can then enquire into the foundation of that reasoning, and into the grounds for claiming that the argument applies to the objects of experience’.<sup>22</sup> The deeper rational synthesis which makes scientific facts logically “experienceable”, Cohen argues, resembles the nature of an underlying scientific hypothesis. As such it organises the phenomena into a scientific experience and manifests itself in the experience of the phenomena *as* lawful. These ‘pure forms of thought are not intended to be discovered *a priori*,’ Cohen insists, but the ‘synthetic *principle*’ is available to us from which we might ‘discover the necessary forms of given experience’ (*KTE* 206; *HC* 13). This position suggests a deeper transcendental structure to the a priority of Kant’s idealism, in doing so abolishing the artificial distinction between the Aesthetic and the Logic in order to re-impose what will effectively become a theory of different orders of knowledge.

For Cohen, then, a transcendental justification of the possibility of metaphysics itself within Kant’s philosophy – as the scientific cognition of lawful facts – points to the implicitly scientific theory of experience underlying Kant’s idealism. As Lydia Patton clarifies, what Kant’s epistemology provides for Cohen is the ‘basis for applying pure laws of thought to real phenomena,’ and ‘the paradigm case of which is the conceptual reasoning behind Newton’s laws of nature’.<sup>23</sup> This pushes consideration of the first *Critique* away from the “reality” of that which is “given” to sensibility, towards the “lawfulness” of that which is “synthesised” in the relation between sensibility and understanding: away from the Aesthetic and towards the Logic. For, as Poma makes

---

20 Hermann Cohen, ‘Das Prinzip der Infinitesimal-Methode und seine Geschichte. Ein Kapitel zur Grundlegung der Erkenntniskritik’, *Werke*, Volume 5, (Hildesheim, Zurich & New York, Georg Olms, 1984), §6, trans. *HC* pp.57-8.

21 Lydia Patton, op. cit., p.75.

22 Ibid., p.52.

23 Ibid., p.15.

clear, the meaning of this deepening of the a priori ‘cannot be totally understood within the context of the *transcendental aesthetic*, since what is missing is an investigation of the act of “synthesis,” which alone constitutes experience, and of the categories, the a priori conditions of the unity of the synthesis’ (HC 10). Because the law itself is not directly intuitable, since it is precisely the law itself that produces the “experienceability” of the phenomena, this demands a rethinking of the limits set by Kant’s *Transcendental Aesthetic*, which in doing so departs from the structural separation of the sensibility from the understanding in Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*.

In *Kant’s Theory of Experience*, Cohen argues that in the *Critique of Pure Reason* the *Aesthetic* already points towards the importance of the *Logic* in deducing the formal a priori elements of experience. Philosophical reflection on experience identifies the purely formal elements of experience, a method explicitly established in the *Transcendental Aesthetic*, which deduces space and time as the pure intuitions of sensibility. This methodology, Cohen argues, is present but hidden in the *Transcendental Logic*, which moves from judgement to the categories, and then to the purity of the principles. However, it is only in the *Transcendental Logic*, with its deduction of ideality of the principles of experience, that the phenomenal-noumenal distinction that characterises Kant’s transcendental idealism becomes properly clarified. The *Aesthetic* therefore presupposes the *Logic* for the clarification of the empirical reality and transcendental ideality of the pure intuition – space and time – discovered there (cf. HC 10-11).

Distinguishing sensibility from the understanding is an abstraction between faculties that mistakenly occludes the character of the co-operation between the a priori forms of both in the underlying synthesis necessary for the possibility of an experience. ‘The synthesis is the common tie,’ Cohen maintains, ‘which guarantees the same a priority, in the forms of intuiting and thinking’ (KTE 104-5; HC 11). Rejecting what he regards as a psychological conception of knowledge as representation, Cohen restores logic to its rightful place at the heart of Kant’s system by imposing a deeper logical “synthesis” (HC 82). Whilst this anticipates Heidegger’s own radical reinterpretation of the *Critique of Pure Reason*’s “common tie” in his 1929 study, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, Cohen’s “synthesis” therefore takes the form of a logical rather than ontological unifiability.<sup>24</sup>

---

24 Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. James C. Churchill, (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1962), pp.20ff. Heidegger appeals to a structurally analogous third kind of (transcendental) synthesis: a precursory act of reference to the essent which constitutes the ‘direction and the horizon within which the essent is first capable of being experienced in the empirical synthesis’. Despite this structural similarity, Heidegger quickly distances his interpretation from neo-Kantianism, and in particular from Cohen’s *Kant’s Theory of Experience*, arguing that, ‘The purpose of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is completely misunderstood, therefore, if this work is interpreted as a “theory of experience” or

The *a priori* does not therefore simply precede objects, but constructs them according to a principle of synthesis in which, ‘the conditions of the *possibility of experience* in general are likewise conditions of the *possibility of the objects of experience*, and that for this reason they have objective value in a synthetic *a priori* judgement’ (*KTE*, 48-9; *HC* 13). On the one hand, this understanding of the *a priori* ‘deepens into the formal conditions of experience’, and, on the other, enlarges into a concept of experience constructed in pure intuition and pure thought: the construction of experience itself.<sup>25</sup> The implications of this intervention into the Trendelenburg-Fischer controversy is that knowledge must come about ‘in *science* and continues to take place *from a given grounding*,’ which has the consequence that Kant’s Transcendental Aesthetic is an investigation that ‘no longer refers to a subjective fact, but to a state of affairs given objectively and *founded on principles*, not on the process and apparatus of cognition, but on the result of these, science’.<sup>26</sup> It is not with the “subjective” phenomenological experience of space and time that the transcendental method is concerned, but the “objective” scientific principles of lawfulness rationally produced within the empirical intuition of space and time.

After insisting that reality ‘is a *relation* between intuition and thought...[and] cannot be reduced to the “pure” element of either intuition or thought, since that will deprive it of its irreducibly relational character’, Cohen concludes that ‘reality is a “presupposition of thought,” a “condition of experience” that “lies at the ground of [experience] and is presupposed for its possibility”’.<sup>27</sup> No longer needing to presuppose a material “given” in sensibility, productive thought becomes the sole origin of both knowledge and object, proceeding from a synthetic scientific fact to the pure logical presuppositions of its possibility. Cohen therefore insists upon ‘the new thing that Kant has to teach us’:

Reality is not in the crude [material] of sensible discovery, and also not in what is pure in sensible intuition, but rather must be given validity as a particular presupposition of thought, like substance and causality, as a condition of experience...<sup>28</sup>

The deeper reality prior to empirical experience becomes, in Cohen’s idealism, the unity of pure thought itself.

This pure thought becomes the ‘legitimate medium for the development of the

---

perhaps as a theory of the positive sciences’ (*ibid.*, p.21).

25 Klaus Christian Köhnke, *The Rise of Neo-Kantianism*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991), p.185.

26 Hermann Cohen, ‘Das Prinzip der Infinitesimal-Methode und seine Geschichte’, *op. cit.*, §7, trans. Lydia Patton, *op. cit.*, p.90.

27 Lydia Patton, *op. cit.*, p.117.

28 Hermann Cohen, ‘Das Prinzip der Infinitesimal-Methode und seine Geschichte’, *op. cit.*, §18, trans. Lydia Patton, *op. cit.*, p.117.

Idea' in Cohen's formulation of the dialectical interaction of the faculties. To do so he draws upon the account of dialectic given in Plato's mature dialogues, in particular that methodology of hypothesising described in the *Republic*, which takes its phenomenal starting assumptions:

...not as absolute beginnings but literally as hypotheses, underpinnings, footings, and springboards so to speak, to enable it to rise to that which requires no assumption and is the starting-point of all, and after attaining to that again taking hold of the first dependencies from it, so to proceed downward to the conclusion', all the while 'making no use whatever of any object of sense [*aisthetoi*] but only of pure concepts [*eidōs*]'.<sup>29</sup>

Plato likens this dialectic of grounding to the methodology of the mathematical and geometrical sciences or *technai*, which move beyond mere intuitions of particular phenomenon to consideration of concepts by using those intuitions as figures standing in for ideals. Cohen takes up and broadens Plato's appeal to scientific methodology in his 1878 essay 'Plato's Doctrine of Ideas and Mathematics' by noting how 'the fundamental concept of [Plato's] specific philosophical method – springs from this characteristic of geometrical thought, at least for its gnoseological legitimation'.<sup>30</sup> Thus he generalizes Platonic dialectic into a characteristic of pure thought itself in order to explain the resulting distinction between understanding and sensibility in the Kantian architectonic. As a consequence, 'one of the most profound and daring thoughts in [Plato's] methodology' for Cohen is 'that he detects a reason for thought in sensation itself', such that numbers 'are already at work in sensation itself'.<sup>31</sup>

Central to the particularity of Cohen's critical idealism, then, is this understanding of the transcendental method of philosophy as a Platonic "giving account" [*Rechenschaft geben*]. Since the a posteriori material content of cognition is 'from the beginning only present in us ourselves – as the entirety of a phenomenon', Cohen argues, the content is 'inherently united in and with the form' in the 'whole phenomenon', and 'only analysed afterwards out of the effect on our senses'.<sup>32</sup> Cohen calls this nature of this unity an Origin [*Ursprung*], one that cannot be conceived as some "first" act, akin to the temporality of the initial suggested in the standard notion of synthesis, because it is immanent in every act and the a priori ground of knowledge itself. Cohen explains the continuity between pure and empirical thought as the dialectical mediation of judgement

---

29 Plato, *Republic*, trans. Paul Shorey, (Cambridge, MA. & London, Harvard University Press, 1969), 511b.

30 Hermann Cohen, 'Platons Ideenlehre und die Mathematik', *Schriften zur Philosophie und Zeitgeschichte*, 2 Bde, (Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 1928), p.361, trans. HC p.32.

31 Hermann Cohen, 'Logik der reinen Erkenntnis', *Werke*, hg. Vom Hermann-Cohen-Archiv am Philosophischen Seminar (Hildesheim, Zürich, G. Olms, 1977), Volume 6, pp.472-73, trans. HC p.35.

32 Hermann Cohen, 'Logik der reinen Erkenntnis', op. cit., trans. Klaus Christian Köhnke, op. cit., p.182.

as the logical ground of thought, knowledge, and experience. It is scientific judgement, identified with the Platonic *technai* of mathematics, geometry, astronomy, and contiguous with the quantitative world addressed by physics, that Cohen utilises to advance this idealist claim.<sup>33</sup>

Once Cohen has removed the Aesthetic by resolving it entirely into the Logic, space and time become emphasised as categories of mathematical thought. As a consequence, the ‘logic of origin becomes the logic of pure knowledge’: that of an “originative” production which is both ‘the necessary beginning of thought’ and ‘the moving principle in every development’.<sup>34</sup> What, in the *Logic of Pure Reason*, Cohen describes as *Ursprungdenken* – thinking based on the principle of origin – is a ‘pure, generating activity which has no beginning but is a primal leap, an act of origination’.<sup>35</sup> Cohen presents the dialectical logic of origination as equally one of production and conservation [*Erhaltung*]: “*There is no exchange, but conservation, at the same time, of separation and unification. Unification is conserved in separation and separation in unification...Therefore, it is to be expected that unity be conserved in manifoldness and manifoldness in unity*”.<sup>36</sup> The difference between this concept and Hegelian sublation [*Aufhebung*] is emphasised by Cohen, who regards it as rectifying what he takes to be the two fundamental errors in Hegel’s philosophy of identity, as Andrea Poma explains: ‘the elimination of the difference between concept and being, thought and reality, and the elimination of the difference between concept and idea, and thus the elimination of the difference between being and what ought to be, between reality and task, for the identity of concept with being’ (*HC* 77). In seeking to oppose himself to what he perceived as Hegel’s philosophy of identity, Cohen insists on maintaining the difference between the real and the ideal in the Kantian system.<sup>37</sup>

Whilst it is this concept of *Ursprung* and the dialectic that it introduces into experience which permits the transformation of a transcendental version of idealism into an outright logical idealism in Cohen’s thought, it is clear from the ‘Epistemo-Critical Prologue’ to the *Origin of German Tragic-Drama* that the dialectical structure of *Ursprungdenken* is not abandoned by Benjamin. Along with Cohen’s analysis of the scientific theory of experience operating in Kant’s system, it therefore has an important

---

33 In his discussion of the education of the philosopher rulers, Socrates specifies the five mathematical studies of arithmetic, plane geometry, solid geometry, astronomy, and harmonics (Plato, *Republic*, op. cit., 524e-531e).

34 Hermann Cohen, ‘Logic der reinen Erkenntnis’, op. cit., p.36, trans. *HC* pp.85-6.

35 Hermann Cohen, ‘Logic der reinen Erkenntnis’, op. cit., p.36, trans. Reiner Munk, *Hermann Cohen’s Critical Idealism*, Amsterdam Studies in Jewish Thought Volume 10, (Dordrecht, The Netherlands, Springer, 2005), p.275.

36 Hermann Cohen, ‘Logic der reinen Erkenntnis’, op. cit., p.62, trans. *HC* p.87.

37 cf. Klaus Christian Köhnke, op. cit., p.196.

influence on the course of Benjamin's own development of Kantian philosophy, even if – as the rest of this chapter will maintain – he is motivated by the opposite intention to Cohen. The importance of Cohen's theory of experience for Benjamin's work will be described in the remainder of this discussion, and the trajectory by which he sought to overcome this implicit problem then examined in Chapters 2 and 3. The conclusion to Chapter 3 will return to Cohen's philosophy to examine in more detail how Benjamin re-appropriates the concept of *Ursprung* in the 'Epistemo-Critical Prologue' within the context of a philosophy whose ontological and dialectical structure has been radically transformed. The argument being developed in what follows is that this transformation is indebted to an aesthetic metacritique of the purism of reason in Kant and Cohen.

#### 1.4 Hamann's Metacritique of the Purism of Reason

Hermann Cohen's recognition that an implicit theory of experience lies at the heart of Kant's transcendental idealism and, moreover, that it is a specifically scientific concept of experience that animates the critical philosophy is decisive for Benjamin. 'The concept of experience that Kant relates to knowledge...has nothing like the same scope as that of earlier thinkers', Benjamin concurs, adding '[w]hat counts for him is the concept of scientific experience' (P 94). Like Cohen, he draws a distinction between the generalised sense in which Kant seems to speak of "experience" in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and the specific character of experience that Kant utilises when he seeks to deduce its purely formal character. Unable to recognise this implicit distinction, Kant's philosophy takes as 'immediate and natural experience' what is already structured and synthesised under the model of unity and continuity offered by "knowledge". Hence the "scientific" model of experience operating in Kant's philosophy marks what Benjamin calls a 'metaphysics that has become rudimentary', and which Cohen seeks to overcome by rendering it first explicit and then critically correcting it.<sup>38</sup>

For Benjamin, the required transformation of Kantianism and the 'development of the transcendental idealism of experience into a speculative idealism' must therefore seek a 'confrontation' with the 'stumbling block' of Kant's Transcendental Aesthetic (P 94). As Benjamin notes, it is the neo-Kantian school – and, it should be added here, Hermann Cohen's philosophy in particular – that systematically sought this 'confrontation'. But in contrast to Cohen, Benjamin insists there 'is no doubt that Kant does *not* intend to reduce all experience so exclusively to scientific experience, no matter how much it may belong, in some respects, to the training of the historical Kant' (PCP 105). This inherited concept of experience, 'whose best aspect, whose quintessence, was Newtonian physics' had,

---

38 Walter Benjamin, 'On the Program of the Coming Philosophy' [hereafter PCP], *SWI* p.103.

Benjamin argues, ‘a restricting effect on Kantian thought’ (*PCP* 101). Where pre-Kantian philosophers ‘sought to establish the closest possible continuity and unity [between experience and knowledge]...through a speculative deduction of the world,’ Kant instead seeks to keep them distinct. He strives to separate scientific experience ‘as far as possible from the ordinary meaning of the experience, and in part, since this was only possible to a degree, to distance from the centre of our understanding of knowledge’ (*P* 94). The “scientific” conceptions of space and time become valid as the legitimate forms of experiential intuition, whilst all other forms of intuition become ‘illusory’ [*scheinbaren*] (*P* 94). In this way, Kant mistook his Newtonian “phenomenal” as the only one, and implicitly excluded all other conceptions of phenomenal experience. Hence, ‘in the neo-Kantian rectification of one of Kant’s metaphysicizing thoughts...a modification of the concept of experience occurred’ which involved ‘the extreme extension of the mechanical aspect of the relatively empty Enlightenment concept of experience’ (*ibid.*). The neo-Kantian school is therefore ‘distinguished by the fact that it continued to use the battle plan set out in Kant’s thought’, and whilst the ‘positivism’ of ‘the exact sciences’ had ‘nurtured the growth of critical thinking’ it is also responsible for its limitations.<sup>39</sup>

‘On the Program of the Coming Philosophy’ situates this ‘great transformation and correction which must be performed on the concept of experience’ for Kant in the context of the philosophy of Johann George Hamann, arguing that it should be theorised by ‘relating knowledge to language’ on the model provided by Hamann’s 1781 *Metacritique of the Purism of Reason*. Hamann’s metacritique anticipates Cohen in recognising an implicit theory of experience operating at the basis of Kant’s transcendental idealism. But rather than regarding this as a problem to be resolved in the manner of Cohen’s effective excision of phenomenological experience, Hamann utilises this dependence on experience to generate an aporia at the heart of Kant’s “Newtonian” project of Enlightenment. Hamann claims that Kant’s transcendental idealism is able to suppose a “pure intuition” of the forms of space and time because of an ‘old, cold prejudice for mathematics before and behind it’.<sup>40</sup> Arguing that this encapsulates either a ‘Gnostic hatred of matter or else a mystic love of form’, his metacritique concludes that Kant’s supposedly critical metaphysics of nature is grounded upon a presupposition of a “pure reason” which has been supposedly purified of experience, history, and language in such a way that, according to Kant’s position itself, its own status remains impossibly and contradictorily metaphysical.

For Hamann, however, the ‘apodeictic certainty of mathematics’ is based solely on

---

39 Walter Benjamin, ‘Review of Hönigswald’s *Philosophie und Sprache*’, *SW4* p.139.

40 J. G. Hamann, ‘Metacritique of the Purism of Reason’, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, ed. Kenneth Haynes, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp.208-10.

its primarily “curiologial” or pictorial-imagistic function. Whilst this is fore-grounded in the linguistic nature of mathematical objects, it not exclusive to it but is rather the general condition of all language.<sup>41</sup> Kant’s prejudice for the logical certainty of mathematics is ungrounded, therefore, and cannot be the basis of the idealism that Cohen privileges in the *Logic of Pure Reason* in order to overcome the problem of the Aesthetic. The implicit dogmatism which Trendelenburg had recognised in the neglected alternative between realism and ideality is not overcome in Cohen’s logical-transcendental deepening of the empirical-psychological misunderstanding of Kant’s concept of experience, because the necessity attributed to scientific knowledge still relies on the assumption of a pure reason which is hypocritically inexplicable. Generalizing this insight into the imagistic-linguistic nature of mathematical signs, Hamann responds to Kant’s question in the Preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason* – ‘how is the *power of thought* itself possible?’ – by insisting that ‘the faculty of thought is possible...before and without, with and beyond experience’ only through the ‘genealogical priority of language’ before the table of categories, and therefore only through language as ‘the pure forms a priori...[and] the true, aesthetic elements of all human knowledge and reason’.<sup>42</sup> Language is therefore both essential to reason and the source of reason’s self-misunderstanding.<sup>43</sup> Experience is primarily linguistic, for Hamann, and at the basis of reason’s capacity for thought lies a pure aesthetics of language.

The implicit valorization of mathematics which Cohen draws upon in his own, Platonized version of Kantian idealism therefore suffers from the same prejudicial purism of reason which Hamann claims misconstrues the true linguistic nature of the objects of mathematical and geometrical thought. For the pure intuition which Cohen, following Kant, grounds in mathematics assigns a seemingly unique status to mathematical objects by insisting on their capacity to transcend the dichotomies between sensibility/rationality, passivity/spontaneity, and form/content which they themselves ground. Cohen therefore transforms into a virtue the paradoxical status of the pure thought which Hamann detects at the ground of Kant’s philosophy, by reifying it into a logical entity. Cohen’s intention to overcome the problematic separation of understanding and sensibility in the Kantian architectonic proceeds by attempting to fully resolve the Aesthetic into the Logic. On the basis of this “pure thought”, Cohen hopes to rescue the certainty of knowledge that had been threatened by speculative metaphysics. But as Hamann’s metacritique makes clear this is a paradoxical project since it ultimately depends upon the Aesthetic in its

---

41 Ibid., pp. 209-210.

42 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, op. cit., p.xvii; J. G. Hamann, ‘Metacritique of the Purism of Reason’, op. cit., pp.210-211.

43 Ibid., p.211.



exploitation of language and experience.

Benjamin concurs with this point when, in the essay ‘On the Program of the Coming Philosophy’, he suggests that Kant’s ‘consciousness that philosophical knowledge was absolutely certain and a priori, the consciousness of that aspect of philosophy in which it is fully the peer of mathematics’ mistakenly lead him to devote ‘almost no attention to the fact that all philosophical knowledge has its unique expression in language and not in formulas or numbers’ (*PCP* 108). It is in order to correct this misunderstanding in Kant and Cohen that Benjamin draws upon the theological idea of language as revelation in Hamann’s aesthetics. For Hamann:

Every phenomenon of nature was a word, – the sign, symbol, and pledge of a new, secret, inexpressible but all the more fervent union, fellowship and communion of divine energies and ideas. All that man heard at the beginning, saw with his eyes, looked upon, and his hands handled was a living word; for God was the word.<sup>44</sup>

The assumption of this general linguistic ontology – in which all creation, perception, thought, speech, and production become forms of expression – becomes necessary to solve the basic hermeneutical problem of meaning or significance, which assumes a far greater importance in Benjamin’s thought than the supposedly timeless certainty of knowledge sought for by Cohen.

This is clear when, in his announcement for the journal *Angelus Novus* in the early 1920s, Benjamin claims that the only true sort of relevance is the contemporary, and dedicates the journal to articulating this ‘experience of a particular way of thinking’.<sup>45</sup> The enduring relevance of Kantianism for Benjamin lies precisely in its ability to give philosophical status to this phenomenology of the ephemeral, and not in the neo-Kantian attempt to exclude it as problematic. In fact, Benjamin’s criticisms of mature neo-Kantianism focus upon the transformation of ‘transcendental questioning’ into ‘a ceremony no longer animated by any real intellectual effort’, in which ‘the terms of transcendental philosophy’ have fallen precisely because neo-Kantianism reneged upon the critical perspective inherent in its ‘oppositional resolve’.<sup>46</sup> Benjamin’s contention is

---

44 J. G. Hamann, ‘The Last Will and Testament of the Knight of the Rose-Cross; Concerning the Divine and Human Origin of Language’, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, op. cit., pp.108-9.

45 Walter Benjamin, ‘Announcement of the Journal *Angelus Novus*’, *SW1* pp.292 & 296.

46 Walter Benjamin, ‘Review of Hönigswald’s *Philosophie und Sprache*’, *SW4* pp.140 & 142. It is significant that Benjamin proposes a ‘threshold’ in the decline of neo-Kantianism. Criticising Cohen for ‘lacking a precise historical imagination’ in the last part of his *System*, the ‘Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls’ (1912), Benjamin explains that ‘the critical and imaginative energies decline’ as those who now find themselves in power ‘adapt themselves to the established order’. The dominance of neo-Kantianism thus contributed to its loss of *critical* edge, and ultimately to its complicity with the rise of fascism. The ‘threshold’ of this decline, Benjamin argues, is marked by Cohen’s 1914 essay ‘Über das Eigentümliche des deutschen Geistes’ (‘On the Particularity of the German Spirit’) – the now naïve seeming sentiments of this and

that Kantian philosophy becomes redundant where it fails to incorporate the ephemeral and contemporary, including the seismic transformations in the nature and structure of experience following the traumatic events of the First World War and the new conditions of urban life under the changing relations of industrial capitalism.<sup>47</sup>

### 1.5 Metacritique or Theological Nostalgia?

Hamann's metacritique opposes Kant's vision of a pure reason by pointing out its fundamentally unknowable and therefore contradictory character. It is not simply that such a pure reason has to be transcendently deduced, but that no part of that transcendental deduction and justification can operate without the sensible and aesthetic function of language and experience. The inexperienceable knowledge at the basis of transcendental idealism thus renders *all* knowledge paradoxical. Hamann would like to conclude at this point, in order not merely to make *more* room for faith than Kant's critical project had levied, but to expose with a proto-deconstructive flourish the nature of the Enlightenment project's contradictory *faith* in reason and knowledge.

In Benjamin's earliest writings there is a tendency to appropriate Hamann's theology of language in order to similarly gesture towards some lost spiritual unity between thought and experience, evoking the Biblical idea of the Fall to explain this absence. Benjamin argues that 'all expression, insofar as it is communication of content of the mind, is to be classed...[and] understood only as language', but because contemporary communication represents a departure from the original unity of divine creation and revelation, it is devalued from its position in the Enlightenment as the paradigm of representation, instrumentality, and mastery over nature to a merely parasitical act of translation in Hamann's philosophy.<sup>48</sup> Speech is the translation 'from an angelic language into a human language, that is to translate thoughts into words, – things into names – images into signs...', which reveals the 'wrong side of a tapestry' in showing the 'Stuff, but not the [divine] Workman's skill'.<sup>49</sup> Poetry is the approximation of that divinely creative word within human speech, which Hamann invokes as the 'mother-tongue of the human race' because of its capacity for self-revelation.<sup>50</sup> In its absence, 'all we have left in nature for our use are jumbled verses and *disjecti membra*

---

other essays on Germany have been commented upon earlier – and Natorp's *Deutscher Weltberuf* ('German World-Mission', 1918).

47 'Peoples and races, dispersed across paradisiacal spaces in the vision of the Enlightenment, became the compact mass of consumers in the world market' (Walter Benjamin, 'Review of Hönigswald's *Philosophie und Sprache*', *SW4* p.140).

48 Walter Benjamin, 'On Language as Such and the Language of Man' [hereafter *LSLM*], *SWI* p.63.

49 J. G. Hamann, 'Aesthetica in Nunce', *Writings in Philosophy and Language*, op. cit., pp.66-7.

50 *Ibid.*, pp. 63-4.

*poetae* [limbs of the dismembered poet]'.<sup>51</sup>

When, in 'The Life of Students' from 1915, Benjamin considers the 'fragmented and derivative' expressions of student life as 'the distorted and fragmented torso of the one erotic spirit', his work therefore seems to draw heavily on Hamann's notion of language in order to critique the lost spiritual greatness of German youth (*LS* 44). For Benjamin, this cultural fragmentation is reflected in the ideological division between the students in the university and the workers in the community, which further manifests itself in the life of students as the perversion of erotically creative, spiritual labour into, on the one hand, the intellectualized and egoistical vocationality of the men's student fraternities and, on the other, the de-eroticized economy of the body in the prostitution which develops at the margins of the university. The influence of Simmel's sociological analysis of modernity upon Benjamin's thought is evident here, with its themes of the alienating effects of modern culture and its fragmentation and distortion of the creative spirit.<sup>52</sup>

An holistic appeal to some unspecified spiritual and cultural unity forms the centre-piece of Benjamin's early essay, when he proposes as the criterion of the true 'spiritual value of a community' the question of whether the 'whole, undivided nature of a human being should be expressed' in the achievements of its individuals (*LS* 39). In other words, the young Benjamin has a tendency to seek the overcoming of the alienating split between aesthetics/science and experience/metaphysics (which secures the basis of Kant's critical philosophy) by appealing to some original unity which permits a speculative metaphysical experience. It is Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, discussing the influence of Hamann's philosophy on his thought in his autobiography, who singles out as 'the principle underlying all of Hamann's utterances' the belief that: 'Everything a human being sets out to accomplish, whether produced by word or deed or otherwise, must arise from the sum of his combined powers; anything isolated is an abomination'.<sup>53</sup> A recognition of the importance of Hamann's theology for Benjamin's appeal to some whole and undivided expression of human nature should therefore be extended to note the Hammanian concept of the "torso" underwriting Benjamin's depiction of the 'mutilation of youth' and the dismemberment of the student "body".

---

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> In his 'Introduction' to *Philosophical Culture* from 1911, Simmel argues that the 'disharmony of modern life, in particular the intensification of technology in every sphere combined with deep dissatisfaction with it, arises from the fact that things become more and more cultivated but people are capable only to a lesser degree of deriving from the improvement of objects an improvement in their subjective lives' (George Simmel, 'Introduction to Philosophical Culture', *Simmel on Culture*, eds. David Frisby & Mike Featherstone, (London, Sage, 1997), p.35).

<sup>53</sup> J. W. von Goethe, 'From My Life: Poetry and Truth', *Collected Works* [hereafter *CW*], ed. Douglas Miller, (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1988), pp.380-1.

In 'The Life of Students', Benjamin argues that 'the only possibility' for opposing this mortification is 'to liberate the future from its deformations in the present' through an 'understanding' which he defines as 'an act of cognition' (*LS* 34 & 46). It is the philosophical formulation of this act of cognition which needs to be explored. What he refers to at one point as the expression of a 'totality of will [*des Wollenden*]' is anticipated in the rest of the essay in accordance with an 'eros of creativity' associated with spiritual productivity (*LS* 34 & 46). The 'Metaphysics of Youth' makes it clear that such creativity has now been lost to us, and that only now can we 'see what we have unwittingly destroyed and created'.<sup>54</sup> The lost spiritual creativity in these early essays on youth therefore reflects that which, in 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man', is theologically described as 'the paradisiacal language' of 'perfect knowledge' from which humanity has fallen:

the Fall marks the birth of the *human word*, in which name no longer lives intact and which has stepped out of the name-language, the language of knowledge, from what we may call its own immanent magic, in order to be expressly, as it were, magic. The word must communicate *something* (other than itself). (*LSLM* 71)

Human communication must overcome its representational aspect in order to mirror the divine act of creation through speech. To depict is, in these early works, to speculatively call into being through language alone: effectively, an intellectual intuition. This holistic, spiritual, and erotic creativity understood is the antithesis of alienated production in Benjamin's early work.

This is variously associated with the genius of artistic expression, the 'conversation of prayer', and the Adamic act of naming.<sup>55</sup> In 'the name, the mental being of man communicates itself to God', Benjamin claims, adding that it does so 'without residue' (*LSLM* 65). Consequently, 'God's creation is completed only when things receive their names from man, from whom in name language alone speaks' (*LSLM* 65). Because 'the germ of the cognizing name' is the linguistic being created by God, the capacity for human naming to denote the particular singularity of the thing is conceived as an act of translation from 'an imperfect language into a more perfect one' which cannot but add knowledge to it (*LSLM* 70). The true genius 'creates the silence of a new language' which is also described as a 'conception without pregnancy'.<sup>56</sup> When Benjamin declares, in 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man', that 'the unique union' of 'conception and spontaneity together' is found only in the linguistic realm – in 'the translation of the language of things into that of man' of which Adam's act of naming is paradigmatic – the

---

<sup>54</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'The Metaphysics of Youth', *SWI* p.6.

<sup>55</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Socrates', *SWI* p.53.

<sup>56</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Socrates', *SWI* p.53.

act of cognition required to liberate the philosophy of history in ‘The Life of Students’ returns to Hamann’s philosophy of language.

To “name” is therefore to liberate a pure linguistic element within concepts, one that is capable of denoting not universals but particulars and that can be detached from concepts and bound up with signifying words.<sup>57</sup> What is central to such “naming” is an ontology of material signification in which a *thing-like* and not *concept-like* component is transmitted in communication. Rejecting any conception of language as fundamentally representational (i.e., signifying something else), Benjamin therefore draws on Hamann’s characterisation of language as imagistic to propose a non-conceptual theory of signification or expression. This appeal to the immanent magic of the word in Benjamin’s early thought is discernible in the differing conceptions of “metaphysics” presented in the essay ‘On Perception’. Benjamin argues that the ‘assertion that a metaphysics is possible can have at least three meanings’ (P 93). The first meaning – the possibility of a metaphysics of nature understood as the *system* of nature, that is, ‘the a priori constitution of natural objects on the basis of the determinants of the knowledge of nature in general’ – is the only one endorsed by Kant. The second – metaphysics as the ‘transcendent use’ of the categories – is rejected by Kant, but possible for Cohen, since critical idealism removes the artificial separation of the understanding and sensibility, and thus posits the possibility of unintuitable knowledge in the existence of scientific laws (P 94). The third meaning of the possibility of metaphysics, ‘that of the deducibility of the world from the supreme principle or nexus of knowledge’ – or, as Benjamin calls it, the concept of ‘speculative knowledge’ – is rejected by both Kant and Cohen, but endorsed to a qualified extent by Benjamin’s speculative version of linguistic idealism.

Benjamin’s understanding of truth in these early essays often utilises theological language to construct what Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe calls a ‘messianic Kant’.<sup>58</sup> This draws Benjamin’s developing philosophy of history away from a preoccupation with scientific knowledge and towards the experienceability, legibility or significance of history. For example, it is possible to recognise from his letter to Gershom Scholem the extent to which Benjamin’s original dissertation topic on Kant and the philosophy of history would have remained critical of Kant for applying this scientific discourse of *justification* to ‘a certain historical constellation of ethical interest’.<sup>59</sup> ‘It is precisely the

---

57 Benjamin finds confirmation for this thesis, in ‘The Ground of Intentional Immediacy’, in the neo-Kantian realism of Alois Adolf Riehl (cf. Walter Benjamin, ‘The Ground of Intentional Immediacy’, *SWI* p.88).

58 Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, ‘Introduction to Walter Benjamin’s The Concept of Art Criticism in German Romanticism’, *Walter Benjamin and Romanticism*, eds. Andrew Benjamin & Beatrice Hanssen, (London, Continuum, 2002), p.15.

59 Walter Benjamin, Letter to Gershom Scholem (dated December 23<sup>rd</sup> 1917), *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin: 1910-1940* op. cit., p.105.

ethical side of history that is represented as inadequate for special consideration' in Kant's 'Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View', Benjamin argues, and in its place 'the postulate of a scientific mode of observation and method is posited'.<sup>60</sup>

However, there is a danger that if theology simply replaces science as the bedrock of Benjamin's early speculative transformation of transcendental idealism, a Hamannian pragmatics of *faith* remains the only possible outcome for the metacritique of the Newtonianism of Kant's Enlightenment project. When Benjamin reflects on the denial of metaphysical experience in his early discussions of bourgeois philistinism, he has a tendency to invert this feature of alienated social existence with an affirmation of its possibility through a Hamannian theology or a Goethean poetics of experience.

### **Coda: Towards a Metaphysics of Experience**

Every 'demand for a *return to Kant* rests upon the conviction that this system...has, by virtue of its brilliant exploration of the certainty and justification of knowledge, derived and developed a depth that will prove adequate for a new and higher kind of experience yet to come' (*PCP* 102). The 'outlines of a development of the transcendental philosophy of experience into a transcendental or speculative philosophy' are discerned by Benjamin in the efforts of the neo-Kantian school's 'abolition of the strict distinction between the forms of intuition and the categories' (*P* 95). Cohen's recognition of an underlying, *originative* relationship between what Kant had divided into the Transcendental Aesthetic and the Transcendental Logic therefore provides the starting point for Benjamin's critical engagement with Kant. But Cohen is able to overcome the arbitrariness of Kant's narrowly scientific concept of experience by expanding the Logic, and the scientific model of knowledge it contains, to such an extent that the Aesthetic is enveloped into purely mathematical-logical medium of knowledge. The result is a fully scientific or logical idealism, which disposes of the materiality given to sensibility to the extent that the *a posteriori* of experience is transformed into an underlying logical structure original to knowledge.

Whilst Cohen subsequently sought to resolve the Aesthetic entirely into the Logic in order to provide a logical foundation for scientific experience, Benjamin refuses such a move on the basis that the Logic is constituted in advance according to a merely "mechanical" exploitation of the Aristotelian categories. In his intention to justify a more speculative concept of experience, Benjamin turns beyond the Kantian system in order to ground intellectually an experience of ephemerality which is inadequately articulated in

---

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

his immature thought through dogmatic appeals to spirit, youth, and poetry. The “lateral” distinction between the Aesthetic and the Logic is replaced in Cohen’s neo-Kantianism by a “medial” one of “experienced knowledge” within a wider sphere of “knowledge”. Positioning Cohen’s idealism in these terms permits the distinction between his own “epistemo-critical” [*Erkenntniskritik*] response to Kant and that route which Benjamin will traverse to become more apparent.

In ‘On Perception’, Benjamin reconfigures Kant’s critical system around the same interpretative schema as Cohen, under the two central headings of “Experience” (*Erfahrung*) and “Knowledge” (*Erkenntnis*), before going on to compare the relationship between the two in terms of that between a painting and the landscape it depicts. Whilst the painting of the landscape is a construction, arrangement or configuration of the real landscape, because it must always emphasise and omit particular details of the view before it, it is nonetheless impossible to speak of such a landscape independently of the painting and thus its inherent possibility for artistic configuration. Describing what might be termed this potential for portrayal in the landscape as the ‘symbol of its artistic context’, Benjamin compares this to “experience” as the ‘symbol of this context of knowledge’ (P 94). The knowability of experience ‘therefore belongs in a completely different order of things from knowledge itself’ (*ibid.*), resulting in a necessary distinction between the spheres of experience as it appears for knowledge and experience when it is postulated outside the context of knowledge. In contrast to what has been termed Cohen’s sphere of “experienced knowledge” within the medium of “knowledge”, Benjamin reversal of this relationship posits “known experience” within the broader medium of “experience” in general, or a transcendental concept of pure experienceability.

An adequately higher sphere of experience must phenomenologically incorporate the most diverse kinds of intuitions, including the “ephemerality” of the contemporary, the “spirituality” of youth, the “irrationality” of the supposedly primitive, and the “mysticism” of the paranormal, into ‘a pure and systematic continuum of experience’ (PCP 105). With this the Aristotelian table of categories will be ‘completely revised’ to permit the ‘knowledge of an experience which is multiply gradated and nonmechanical’ (PCP 107). Whilst Benjamin appeals to a ‘theory of orders’, founded upon ‘primal concepts’ and comprising ‘that which Kant discusses in the transcendental aesthetic, and, furthermore, all the basic concepts not only of mechanics but also of geometry, linguistics, psychology, the descriptive natural sciences, and many others...’, it is important to insist that in relation to his transformation of Kantian philosophy, the “primal” nature of these concepts must be formulated in such a way that their primordality is not understood as chronological or logical, but as ontological (PCP 107). Benjamin will effectively seek to “invert” Cohen’s idealist move beyond Kant by placing

the “known experience” appearing within the Logic into a mediated relationship with the Aesthetic, as a deeper and more fundamental level of transcendental experience. The result of this Hamannian metacritique of Cohen’s neo-Kantianism must lead beyond the magic of naming conceived as a speculative knowledge from within idealism, and be developed instead into a transcendental concept of pure experience which leads Benjamin’s philosophy towards a transcendental empiricism and a materialist theory of ideas.<sup>61</sup>

---

61 Here, Benjamin comes closest to the later neo-Kantianism of Emil Lask, whose influence upon Martin Heidegger and George Lukács has become the subject of a number of recent studies (cf. István M. Fehér, ‘Lask, Lukács, Heidegger: the problem of irrationality and the theory of the categories’, *Martin Heidegger: Critical Assessments*, ed. Christopher E. Macann, (London & New York, Routledge, 1992), Volume 2; Theodor Kisiel, ‘Why Students of Heidegger will have to read Emil Lask’, *Man and World*, 28, 3, (July, 1995)). Lask emerged, like Benjamin, out of Rickert’s Baden rather than Cohen’s Marburg School, publishing two works – *Logic of Philosophy and the Doctrine of the Categories* [*Die Logik der Philosophie und die Kategorienlehre*] (1911) and *The Doctrine of Judgement* [*Die Lehre vom Urteil*] (1912) – before his death in the First World War. His philosophy ‘adopts the “standpoint of transcendence” to given an ontological interpretation of the object as a unity of categorial form and alogical material’ (Steven Galt Crowell, *Husserl, Heidegger, and the Space of Meaning: Paths toward Transcendental Phenomenology*, (Evanston, Illinois, Northwestern University Press, 2001), p.28). This ‘resurgent metaphysics’ lays claim ‘to something more “primordial” than what has already been elaborated scientifically’: ‘a transcendental objectivity which implies a rediscovery of the primordial world’ (ibid., p.28; Gabriel Motzkin, op. cit., p.173). Thus, ‘In contrast to Cohen, for whom the object is constructed in the scientific judgement, Lask argues that “the most basic problems of logic reveal themselves only if pretheoretical cognition is included in the investigation.”’ (Stephan Galt Crowell, op. cit., p.28). Such cognition reflects an alternative access to Being, not through knowledge but through an aletheiological experience of truth. For Gabriel Motzkin this ontology implies a rejection of Hegelian dialectic: it ‘implies that matter, the principle of the sphere of Being, is the principle of generation’, entailing a ‘devaluation of Hegelian generation as a dialectic of identity and contradiction’, such that ‘Lask rather like Marx thought that the substrate is objective’ (Gabriel Motzkin, op. cit., p.177).



## 2. Walter Benjamin's "Tender empiricism": Towards a Materialist Theory of Ideas

*There is a tender empiricism which becomes intimately identical with its object and thereby becomes actual theory.*

– J. W. von Goethe, *Maxims and Reflections*, #565

### 2.1 The Problem of Biological Experience in Kant's *Critique of Judgement*

Walter Benjamin's early 'Program for the Coming Philosophy' designates the problem faced by 'every great epistemology' as linking 'the question of the certainty of knowledge that is lasting' with 'the question of the integrity of an experience that is ephemeral' (*PCP* 100). The previous chapter argued that Kant's transcendental idealism – and subsequently Cohen's critical idealism – only managed to 'give a valid explanation' for the former, rescuing the eidetic approach of Platonic philosophy through a transcendental methodology concerned primarily with universals in the context of knowledge. Because in doing so Kant could secure knowledge only for a reality of 'a low, perhaps the lowest, order', he was unable to incorporate the integrity and particularity of the ephemeral. Concerned only with the universal formality of the objectively necessary, the Kantian concept of experience is unable to integrate the majority of phenomenological experience into its system.

The 'Program for the Coming Philosophy' suggests that the resources for postulating an alternative model for the possibility of historical experience might be sought in Kant's third *Critique* which deals with judgement not in the context of the mathematical sciences, but in its application to artistic and biological experience. When Benjamin claims that one of the greatest problems of Kant's philosophy concerns the third part of the system and 'the question of those scientific types of experience (the biological ones)', he acknowledges that Kant did not ground such experiences in the Logic and raises the question of why he did not do so (*PCP* 107). By considering the problem of life within Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, it will become apparent that the answer to this question lies in the radically unsettling character of biological experience for Kant's critical metaphysics of nature. This exposes the architectonic of the Kantian system to the troubling possibility of a speculative intuition. The third *Critique* wards off such a possibility only by insisting on the merely regulative status of the consequent judgement, effectively denying scientific value to the nascent biology of Kant's age.

Following the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant becomes increasingly concerned with integrating into his scientific system those experiences which evade the conceptual grasp of the mechanically orientated categories of the understanding, from ethical and historical to aesthetic and biological types of experience. In the *Critique of Judgement*, concerned

with exploring the latter two, he identifies the concept of natural purpose as ‘that stranger in natural science’ which, in the words of Timothy Lenoir, force him to conclude that ‘the life sciences must rest upon a different set of assumptions and that a methodological strategy different from the physical sciences must be worked out if biology is to enter upon the royal road to science’.<sup>1</sup> In Kant’s example, a tree considered as the effective cause of its species in reproduction, of itself in growth, and of its organs in preservation, must also involve an idea of a final cause, in order to explain the ultimate self-organization of, respectively, the reproductive processes, formless plant material, and interdependent organs.

What Kant terms a “natural purpose” is therefore ‘*both cause and effect of itself*’, or more precisely: ‘the possibility of its parts (as concerns both their existence and their form) must depend on their relation to the whole’, and furthermore, ‘the parts of the thing [must] combine into the unity of a whole because they are reciprocally cause and effect of their form’ (*CJ Ak.* 370 & 373). Natural purposes possess a unique and ‘paradoxical status’ within Kant’s system, being something given in experience which, according to Alberto Toscano, ‘cannot be an *object of knowledge*, and allows for no direct representation, no subsumption under a concept’.<sup>2</sup> The faculty of understanding now finds itself ‘not simply incapable of anticipating the form of the organism (which is no reason for alarm, considering our cognitive finitude) but cannot even formulate its *possibility*’.<sup>3</sup> More than this, Kant’s insistence on the uncognizable character of biological organization renders it uniquely inexplicable: unlike the kind of speculative *concepts* which arise from the transcendental use of reason (the rational Ideas which are thinkable, but not intuitable), natural purposes are nonetheless given to sensibility and therefore intuitable but not thinkable. The problem of biological “life” in Kant therefore corresponds to the seemingly impossible experience of a speculative intuition.

This curious status of natural purposes reveals what Toscano identifies as ‘a certain instability at the heart of the project of transcendental philosophy’, which threatens to undermine not only the stability of science, but the scientific foundations upon which Kant’s transcendental system is constructed.<sup>4</sup> The ‘essential difficulty’ that troubles Kantian biology is ‘that mechanical modes of explanation’, which proved so effective within natural philosophy and its Newtonian understanding of reality, are nonetheless

---

1 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement* [hereafter *CJ*], trans. Werner S. Pluhar, (Indianapolis, Hackett, 1987), *Ak.* 390; Timothy Lenoir, ‘The eternal laws of form: morphotypes and the conditions of existence in Goethe’s biological thought’, *Journal of Social and Biological Structures: Studies in Human Social Biology*, 7, 4, (1984), p.319.

2 Alberto Toscano, *The Theatre of Production: Philosophy and Individuation between Kant and Deleuze*, (Basingstoke & New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp.30 & 24.

3 *Ibid.*, p.31.

4 *Ibid.*, p.22.

‘inadequate to deal with many processes of the organic realm, where the relationship of cause to effect is completely different from that encountered in the inorganic realm’.<sup>5</sup> Singular organisms therefore seem to fall within a strange hinterland between the principles of natural mechanism and rational freedom, and hence outside the proper conceptual domain integral to scientific understanding as conceived in the first Critique.<sup>6</sup> Just as it seems impossible to Kant that there could be a science of aesthetics, so it appears unfeasible from his historical perspective that there could be a “science” of life. However, Kant does not consider the troubling question of whether his own conception of nature and the mechanistic categories of the understanding which govern it might be amiss. In order to preserve the systematic unity of his transcendental philosophy, he is therefore required to give an explanation for this limitation which accounts for the impossible appearance of natural purposes, and he seeks to do so without undermining the universal applicability of the metaphysics of nature which he had secured for Newtonian science in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

Kant manages to preserve his existing concept of scientific experience by assuming that a different kind of exhibition must be involved in biological experience and sets about explaining this through a diagnosis of the conceptual limitations of human understanding and an appeal to a reflective operation of judgement. The anomalous contingency of natural organisms is therefore explained by ‘the *particular* that judgement has to bring under the *universal* supplied by the concepts of the understanding’ (*CJ Ak.* 406). ‘For the universal supplied by *our* (human) understanding does not determine the particular; therefore...the variety of ways in which they may come before our perception is contingent’, and it is ‘this contingency that makes it so difficult for our understanding to unify the manifold in nature so as to [give rise to] cognition’. Consequently, the contingency of the particular follows from the limitations of the abstract universal concepts – defined as ‘analytically universal’ – utilised by the human intellect. Whilst they are capable of determining the common characteristics of things, they leave the a posteriori content of the particular undetermined.

This limitation follows from Kant’s separation of the Transcendental Logic from the Aesthetic, and preserves the human understanding as a “power of concepts” but in doing so comes perilously close to permitting a seemingly speculative intuition of a deeper underlying freedom behind phenomena. Kant therefore explains this concept of natural purpose as one reflectively borrowed from the rational concept of human

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp.317-8.

<sup>6</sup> ‘But teleology does not seem to belong to natural science. For natural science requires determinative and not merely reflective principles in order to indicate objective bases for natural effects....So teleology as a science does not belong to any doctrine, but belongs only to critique’ (*CJ Ak.* 417).

intentionality or purposes, and in this way evades the question of the reality – in this instance, both its transcendental and its empirical reality – of such a concept by referring to its merely regulative status (*CJ Ak.* 406). In a passage which is perhaps indebted to Kant's Pietist upbringing, he goes on to draw a distinction between an *archetypal* and an *ectypal* understanding of the world which mirrors that drawn more generally in Protestant theology between the *archetypal theology* of God's self-revelation (i.e., theology in the infinite mind of the Creator) and the *ectypal theology* of God's revelation to his finite creatures (i.e., theology as we apprehend it).<sup>7</sup> Kant hypothesises an *intellectus archetypus* capable of possessing an 'intuition of the whole as a whole' and consequently of grasping the particular parts and their relation to the formal whole via "synthetical universals" or "archetypes".<sup>8</sup> Such intuitions are denied to our discursive understanding with its power of concepts, precisely because the "archetypal intellect" 'does not (by means of concepts) proceed from the universal to the particular and thus to the individual' (*CJ Ak.* 406).

Toscano notes how the introduction of this opposition and the diversion into reflective judgement is enforced 'for the sake of the systematic unity of critique and its theistic destination': 'the absolute separation of life from matter...the heteronomous nature of causation; the *a priori* character of the grounds of scientific knowledge; the subordination of biological evidence to mechanism as the legislating authority in the realm of appearances'.<sup>9</sup> It permits Kant to preserve both the Newtonian certainty of a mechanistic world of forces and the necessarily imperfect understanding of finite creatures. To the extent that Cohen's fully-fledged idealism moves beyond the finite capacities imposed by Kant, it sacrifices the unity of the mechanical categories and recovers a pure logic whose dialectical structure introduces concepts of "origin" and

---

7 'Reformist orthodox writers...spoke of "archetypal theology" (*theologia archetypa*) as the perfect and complete theology which exists in God's own mind, and they described the fragmented and incomplete theology of human beings as an "ectypal theology" (*theologia ectypa*) which partially and imperfectly reflects its divine archetype' (Benjamin Myers, *Milton's Theology of Freedom*, (Berlin & New York, Walter de Gruyter, 2006), p.73). Due to the 'necessary chasm between God and creature, as taught by the great reformer John Calvin...God must accommodate Himself to His creatures in order to communicate with them. Accommodated revelation is called *ectypal theology* or *theologia ectypa*. Just the way a signet ring imprints its image in the wax, ectypal theology is build according to the model of archetypal theology and is entirely dependent upon it' (John Barber, *The Road from Eden*, (Palo Alto, Ca., Academica Press, LLC, 2008), p.470). The distinction was first coined by Francis Junius – student of Calvin at the Geneva academy in the 1560s, co-translator of the 1579 *Biblia Sacra*, the standard Latin biblical text of the Reformation, and author of the 1590 *De Vera Theologia* in which the terms first appear – but 'it has its origins in the late medieval Scotism' (Carl R. Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, (Aldershot, Hampshire & Burlington, VT., Ashgate Publishing, 2007), p.36).

8 In the same sense, Kant in the first *Critique* defines Philosophy, 'the system of all philosophical cognition', as an objective archetype [*Urbild*], one that serves for judging any subjective philosophizing 'whose edifice is quite often diverse and changeable' (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, op. cit., *Ak.* A838/B866).

9 Alberto Toscano, op. cit., pp.25 & 44.

“end” as fundamental categories of experience. The regulative status of teleological judgement in Kant’s account of biological organisms is shifted in Cohen’s philosophy from a pragmatic condition of exhibition to the context of an ethical idealization of history. Whilst Kant keeps nature and history separate, treating natural purposiveness *as if* free, Cohen resolves biology *into* history: evolution is reinterpreted as the “boundary” which borders upon the infinite, ideal and moral task of human history.<sup>10</sup>

This problem of living organisation or natural purposes provokes Kant’s agnosticism towards the scientific status of the discipline which will only come to be christened “biology” by Lamarck – the “Science of Life” in Gottfried Reinhold Treviranus’s description – a decade later in 1802.<sup>11</sup> Whilst the mechanism which Kant puzzled over would be identified half a century later with Darwin’s research into natural selection and evolution, his diversion into reflective judgement at this point nonetheless marks the refusal to countenance other philosophical possibilities. What appears to us in its contingency still features as a universal characteristic of life: this suggests an underlying lawfulness that Kant cannot account for in the usual transcendently idealist manner, because the absence of a cognizable concept indicates it has not been determinately supplied as a pure form of reason as, for example, causality supposedly has. The “purity” of this content must therefore be considered outside of the transcendental or critical *idealist* explanation.

## 2.2 The Romantic Theory of Experiment and the Problem of Form

The emphasis placed upon biology and the natural sciences in this chapter is intended primarily to counter the suggestion of any straightforward substitution of scientific knowledge for spiritual or religious pragmatism in Benjamin’s metaphysics. For it is here, specifically in the impossibly speculative intuition of nature, that an aesthetic dialectic, which overcomes the artificially imposed abyss between the categories of the understanding and the forms of sensibility, becomes possible, one which has the potential to liberate the Kantian concept of experience from the positivist prejudices of the Newtonian context of mathematics and physics.

This possibility is further reinforced by the value that Benjamin places upon the Romantic philosophy of science in his dissertation on ‘The Concept of Art Criticism in Early German Romanticism’ (1919). Benjamin’s consideration of the cognition of natural objects forms part of his reconstruction of the epistemology underlying the Early German

---

10 Cf. Hermann Cohen, ‘Ethik des reinen Willens’, *Werke*, hg. Vom Hermann-Cohen-Archiv am Philosophischen Seminar, (Zürich, Hildesheim, G. Olms, 1981), Volume 7, pp. 40ff; cf. *HC* 247-8.

11 Joel Black, ‘Scientific Models’, *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, ed. Marshall Brown, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000), Volume 5, p.126.

Romantic concept of criticism, and therefore takes up, albeit only in an indirect way, the question of biological experience which is raised in his 'Program for the Coming Philosophy'. The Romantics raised Kant's concept of criticism to a higher power, Benjamin argues, through which it acquires 'an almost magical meaning' for speculative philosophy as an "objectively productive" thought in which 'the knowledge of truth sprang forth magically, as it were, from insight into the falsehood' of the restrictive conditions of thought.<sup>12</sup> Hence, as 'soon as the philosophy of history, in Kant...still explicitly and emphatically affirmed both the possibility of thinking an intellectual intuition and its impossibility in the realm of experience, a manifold and almost feverish endeavour emerged to recover this concept for philosophy...' (CC 121). It therefore 'appeared quite plausible' to the Romantics that the overcoming of the philosophical extremes of dogmatism and scepticism could be carried out in aesthetics 'under the same name by which Kant had arbitrated that conflict in epistemology', and moreover that "higher criticism" could even prove more important – because more speculative – than Kant's own epistemological critique (CC 144-5). If the 'theory of natural knowledge is indispensable' both as the basis of and for the exposition of this concept of criticism, it is here that the problem of biological experience in Kant might be exploited to overcome the critical reservations of his own architectonic (CC 144). At the same time, there is a danger that the Romantic privileging of the form of knowledge threatens to collapse into an intellectual intuition reasserting the kind of productivity of thought which underlies Cohen's idealism.

The central feature of Romantic science is the overcoming of the absolute dualism between subject and object by the insistence on reality as a medium of perception in which the 'subject-object correlation is abrogated' (CC 146). The immediacy of perception therefore 'proceeds from a medium common to the perceiver and the perceived,' Benjamin explains, 'as the history of philosophy shows in the case of Democritus, who describes perception on the basis of a partly material interpenetration of subject and object' (CC 147). This mediated conception of perception shares with Hamann's theology of linguistic revelation, considered in the previous chapter, an appeal to the immanent magic of the cognitive word. As a consequence of this account, the Romantic conception of criticism is seen to correspond to their scientific understanding of the "experiment [*Experiment*]" as a 'magical observation' in which 'the experimenter is capable...of getting nearer to the object and of finally drawing it into himself' (CC 148).

Benjamin goes on to note that Novalis 'cites approvingly Goethe's opinion "that every substances has its closer rapport with itself, just as iron in magnetism"', and agrees

---

12 Walter Benjamin, 'The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism' [hereafter CC], *SWI* p.142.

that ‘Goethe’s work displays a concept of empiricism [*Empirie*] which is very close to the Romantic concept of observation’ (CC 148 & n.149, 192; translation altered). This is most apparent in Goethe’s description of his scientific approach as a ‘tender empiricism [*zarte Empirie*] which becomes intimately identical [*innigst identisch*] with its object and thereby becomes actual theory [*zur eigentlichen Theorie wird*].<sup>13</sup> Adopting Johann Heinroth’s description of his thought as a thinking *objectively*, Goethe describes an experience in which thinking ‘is not separate from objects; that the elements of the object, the perceptions of the object, flow into my thinking and are fully permeated by it; that my perception itself is a thinking, and my thinking a perception’.<sup>14</sup> The residual traces of this encounter appear in thought as material after-images [*nachbilder*], a concept which will become important to Benjamin’s mnemonic understanding of historical experience. Fundamental to Goethe’s concept of experience, therefore, is a similar theory of the “experiment” as a ‘mediation [*vermittler*],’ in which the absolute division between subject and object is suspended.<sup>15</sup>

Benjamin’s claim concerning the similarity between the Romantic and Goethean theory of experiment is qualified, however, by the reservation that ‘the ultimate intention of [Goethe’s] regard for nature does not at all coincide with the romantic theory in question’, and he concludes that he must at this point leave ‘undecided’ how far the Romantic “experiment” ‘actually accords with Goethe’s opinion’ (CC n.149, 192 & 148).<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, Benjamin takes up this distinction again – this time in the context of art – in the supplementary afterword to the dissertation on ‘The Early Romantic Theory of Art and Goethe’. Here he is less equivocal, insisting that the important distinction between the Romantic and Goethean theories of criticism is based upon their differing conceptions of the nature of the medium of observation. Benjamin admits in a footnote that ‘[n]o evidence’ for this Goethean position ‘can be offered within this narrow framework’ because ‘the relevant passages would require as detailed an interpretation as the propositions of the early Romantics do’ (CC 199, n.308). Although he indicates that such an exposition ‘will be pursued elsewhere in the widened context it demands’, no such direct discussion appears except in scattered references across his subsequent work

---

13 MR #565. It should be noted that this tender empiricism is distanced from the “expanded empiricism” of Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie* by Goethe on the basis that Schelling ‘is seldom capable of recognizing law in an individual case’ (MR ##1373 & 1374).

14 J. W. von Goethe, ‘Significant Help Given by an Ingenious Turn of Phrase’, *CW12* p.39.

15 Ibid.

16 This displays a resistance to the common predilection to uncritically conflate Goethean and Romantic science within the domain of *Naturphilosophie*, a tendency which has been challenged in a number of recent studies. R. H. Stephenson, for example, rejects the description of ‘Goethe’s Romantic approach to science’ as ‘still persistent “hyperbolic caricatures” of Goethe’s position’ (R. H. Stephenson, *Goethe’s Conception of Knowledge and Science*, (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1995), p.21 [emphasis added]).

(CC 199, n.308).

The distinction drawn between a Romantic and a Goethean conception of the Absolute, and therefore of the nature of the “experiment” as it mediates between subject and object, suggests that for Benjamin there is something specific about the Goethean concept of experience which proves fruitful for his own attempt to think beyond the narrowly scientific limitations of the Kantian theory of experience, and which is, nonetheless, distinguishable from the Romantic model of criticism so important to his philosophy. In this chapter, a feature of the Goethean concept of experience will be examined which does not receive explicit attention in Benjamin’s discussion, but which nonetheless clarifies its difference from Romanticism: the quasi-materialist aspect of what Goethe defines as his “objective thinking”. Benjamin’s discussion of the pure contents which are associated with a Goethean intuition of nature make it clear that, in contrast to the formalism of the Romantic theory of reflection, there is here an implicit mediation between subject and object which suggests a materialist theory of ideas. The Romantic conception of the medium through which the object penetrates the observing subject in artistic criticism is that of a Fichtean ‘medium that shelters in itself and builds out of itself the context of forms’ (CC 179). This indicates ‘a continually more comprehensive unfolding and enhancement of poetic forms’ in transcendental poetry, in which the work undergoes ‘an infinite process of fulfilment’ through progressively intensifying reflection (CC 168). At the heart of Romantic reflection is a theory of pure form which problematically reasserts the Fichtean idealism of an immediate cognition through self-knowledge, in which the content of thought is conceived as the ‘form of the form’ of thinking. Hence, in Benjamin’s reading, at the basis of the Romantic philosophy of science lies the belief that there is ‘in fact no knowledge of an object by a subject’, only a ‘self-knowledge’ in which the ‘subject-object correlation is abrogated’ entirely at the expense of the object.<sup>17</sup> What Benjamin characterises as the ‘radical, mystical formalism’ of the Romantic theory of cognition therefore effectively ends up jettisoning a theory of experience altogether for an idealism of intuitive knowledge, from which all content has

---

17 CC 146. Winfried Menninghaus has criticised Benjamin’s characterisation of Fichte and Early German Romanticism for being an inaccurate distortion of their work and intentions. She argues, for example, that rather than ‘guaranteeing immediate cognition’ (as Benjamin suggests here), reflection ‘produces a reversal in its relation to what is reflected, an ‘ordo inversus’; it guarantees precisely that the absolute “can never be obtained from within itself.” [Novalis, *Schriften*, ed. Paul Kluckhohn (Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 1968-81), Volume 2:127, p.131]’ (Winfried Menninghaus, ‘Walter Benjamin’s Exposition of the Romantic Theory of Reflection’, *Walter Benjamin: Critical Evaluation in Cultural Theory*, ed. Peter Osborne, (London & New York, Routledge, 2005), Volume 1, p.29. The problem of Benjamin’s interpretation of Romanticism will be considered in the final chapter; it is sufficient to point out that whether the Fichtean-Romantic account of knowledge is more complex and sophisticated than Benjamin allows, it still proceeds essentially through the primacy of the cognizing subject.



been effaced (CC 123). Partly as a consequence of this, the Romantics are forced turn to religion to attain the semblance of content within their work (CC 179).

Goethe, in contrast to Early German Romanticism, neglects the philosophical problem of form. Although this assertion is made by Benjamin within the context of a discussion of Goethe's aesthetics, it will prove to have an important implication for his theory of science. Benjamin's criticism is that Goethe leaves the problem of the absolute form of art unresolved because he is unable to distinguish this from the presentational form of particulars works. As a consequence of this confusion, his understanding of form is based upon the historical determined form of Greek plastic art, which is generalized into a theory of "style" that privileges 'representation of a typifying sort' (CC 184). For example, in 'Simple Imitation, Manner, and Style', Goethe sought to transcend the imitative and expressive artistic forms of Naturalism and Mannerism by defending a "style" in which the artist seeks some 'order in multiplicity of appearances and learn to juxtapose and recreate distinct and characteristic forms'.<sup>18</sup> Because a 'great work of art...treats its diverse subject matter as a unified whole and reveals the significance and dignity of even the most ordinary subjects, it goes beyond nature', he argues, concluding that the truth [*Wahrheit*] of art lies not in its verisimilitude [*Wahrscheinlichkeit*] to nature but in its capacity to represent the essence of things 'in visible and tangible form'.<sup>19</sup> Whilst Benjamin does not oppose the capacity attributed to art here, he does criticise Goethe for the unhistorical assumption that it is the specific forms of classical art which remain important and capable of expressing the truth outside of the context of the classical world.

Under the influence of Winckelmann's classicism, Goethe comes to regard Greek art as prototypical. To understand Benjamin's claim, it is useful to consider George Lukács description of Goethe's aesthetic as the 'attempt to create a *bourgeois classical art*'.<sup>20</sup> Goethe 'sough the model and the foundation for the solution to the problem of form in Greek art', Lukács argues, albeit in a way that was not concerned with simply imitating the classical laws of genre but applying them to 'the material which the modern age offers its poets'. For Lukács, the recognition of the 'category of the *characteristic* as an essential distinguishing feature of ancient art' provides Goethe with a realist model for the depiction of the objective social content of life.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the distinction Lukács draws between "portrayal" and "reportage" in contemporary literature suggests the value

---

18 J. W. von Goethe, 'Simple Imitation, Manner, Style', *CW3* p.72.

19 J. W. von Goethe, 'On the Truth and Verisimilitude of the Artwork [*Über Wahrheit und Wahrscheinlichkeit der Kunstwerke*]' (1798), *CW3* pp.77-8; J. W. von Goethe, 'Simple Imitation, Manner, Style', *CW3* p.72.

20 Georg Lukács, 'The Correspondence between Schiller and Goethe', *Goethe and His Age*, trans. Robert Anchor, (London, Merlin Press, 1979), p.76.

21 *Ibid.*, pp.78-9.

that the “characteristic” in classical art might have held for Goethe. Whereas “reportage” reproduces reality in accordance with scientific verification, which takes ‘the fact, i.e. the individual case...concretely and individually...as an example of the illustration in general’, “portrayal” is concerned with ‘the reproduction of reality in a manner faithful to its true content’: that is with truth, ‘...immaterial [of] how many details may not coincide with the underlying empirical reality’.<sup>22</sup>

In an earlier essay, Lukács clarifies this through a discussion of “portraiture”. The ‘likeness’ between a portrait and its subject is not one of empirical verisimilitude but of the ‘intensity of the work and its vision’, which compels us to ‘feel that his life was exactly as shown by the lines and colours of the painting’ in its ‘struggle for truth’.<sup>23</sup> This becomes even more apparent in landscape painting, because ‘in front of a landscape we never ask ourselves whether this mountain or that river really is as it is painted there’.<sup>24</sup> Benjamin’s criticism of Goethe’s understanding of style in ‘The Concept of Criticism’ and ‘Goethe’s *Elective Affinities*’ anticipate his later objections to Lukács’ position in the debate on literary realism. Goethe’s discussion offers a ‘reference to the criterion of certain prototypes’, specifically the ‘sublime naturalism’ of Greek plastic art (encapsulated, Benjamin says, in the anecdote concerning the sparrows alighting on the grapes painted by a Greek master, which Goethe mentions in ‘On Truth and Verisimilitude in Art’), but fails to provide any ‘philosophical clarification of the problem of form’ itself (CC 184 & 181). Consequently, Goethe – like Lukács – takes classical realism as a model to be imitated, rather than an archetype to be learnt from.

Despite this, Goethe’s insight into the need for representation in relation to truth leads him into the profound depths of the problem of content in art, and it is here that his thought surpasses that of the Early German Romantics. Since it is not the visible world of nature that art so strenuously strives to represent as true, the object of art cannot be taken simply as the specific contents of the particular artwork. The relation between the work and that which it seeks to represent or resemble ‘signifies precisely the relation of what is perceptible in the highest degree to what in principle is only intuitable’ (CC 180). It is here that Goethe’s aesthetic touches upon his metaphysics of nature, since this relation between the perceptible and the intuitable indicates what he understands as that between the phenomena and the “primal phenomena [*Urphänomen*]” or “archetypes [*Urbilder*]” of nature. Benjamin characterises this realm of the ‘supreme conceptual unity of content’, which ‘manifests itself in a limited, harmonic discontinuum of pure contents’ (CC 179).

---

22 Georg Lukács, ‘Reportage or Portrayal?’, *Essays on Realism*, ed. Rodney Livingstone, (London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1980), pp.48-52.

23 Georg Lukács, ‘On the Nature and Form of the Essay’, *Soul and Form*, trans. Anna Bostock, (London, Merlin Press, 1974), p.11.

24 Ibid., pp.10-11.

The truth that art seeks to represent or make perceptible concerns the pure contents of “true nature” that are intuited but not perceived. Here, then, in the context of biological experience which so troubled the Kantian system with its impossibly speculative intuition, Goethe’s concept of the primal phenomenon embodies the struggle to overcome the narrow limitations of Newtonian science through a specifically metaphysical theory of experience.

### 2.3 “To Portray Rather than to Explain”: Goethe’s Aesthetics of Science

Whilst Kant’s *Critique of Judgement* is regarded by Timothy Lenoir as the ‘definite analysis’ of the ‘difficulties and intricate problems’ relating to this emergence, Goethe – whose *Metamorphosis of Plants* was published the same year as the third *Critique* – is acknowledged ‘[o]ne of the most distinguished co-workers in this enterprise’.<sup>25</sup> In contrast to Kant, Goethe sought a speculative metaphysics of nature, insisting that there are ‘problems in the natural sciences which cannot be adequately discussed without involving the help of metaphysics; not just, however, a school and world-wisdom, but the kind that existed before, with and after physics, that now is and will be hereafter’ (*MR* #546). His scientific writings, however, are largely unsystematic, offering a blend of original empirical research in geology, comparative anatomy, plant morphology, colour, and the weather with isolated philosophical reflections influenced by Spinoza and Kant, and filtered through his aesthetic sensibilities as a poet, dramatist and novelist. Although Goethe could not give proper philosophical foundation to this theory, the value his science held for Benjamin concerns an attempt to rescue a speculative and metaphysical concept of experience from the ideological prejudices of his day.

Goethe’s lifelong engagement with science should be understood as a passionate intellectual struggle against the mathematization and quantification of scientific empirical inquiry which is encapsulated for him in Newton’s approach to a merely “artificial nature”. Hence, his research into the presence of a metamorphosized intermaxillary bone in the human skull is directed against the theological insistence on the absolute and fixed distinction between humans and other creatures; the *Metamorphosis of Plants* against the rigid and essentialist classificatory system of Linnean taxonomy, whose ‘conceptual approach [was] more suited to the spirit of the time’ which favoured preformation theory as the ‘successive development undergone by things dating from the time of Adam’; and the *Theory of Colour* against the “pathological” artificiality of the Newtonian experiments upon colour which imprisoned phenomena in a ‘gloomy empirical-

---

25 Timothy Lenoir, ‘The eternal laws of form: morphotypes and the conditions of existence in Goethe’s biological thought’, op. cit., pp.317-8.

mechanical-dogmatic torture chamber'.<sup>26</sup> His other investigations into the weather and geology are similarly motivated by the desire 'to banish mathematical philosophical theories from those area of physics where they only hinder insight instead of furthering it, and where mathematical treatment has found such a wrong-headed application by the one-sidedness of the development of scientific education' (MR #1282).

For Goethe the dominance of the mathematical approach to empirical science depends upon a reification of form which ends up mistaking exactitude for truth.<sup>27</sup> This obsession with quantity leads the mathematical scientist to attempt to 'include the immeasurable world together with the measurable and calculable world' so that 'everything appears tangible, within reach and mechanical' (MR #1286). But Goethe insists that 'quantity and quality must be looked upon as the two poles of visible being', and whilst '[n]othing is of value [to mathematics]...except form: content is a matter of indifference', his attempt to develop a morphological appreciation of nature is intended to grasp and represent its dynamism, its particular content, and its specific quality (MR #1286 & #605).

The emergence of the biology as a scientific dispute at the end of the eighteenth century undergoes a crisis that occurs whenever a 'corpus of knowledge is ready to become a science', Goethe argues (MR #419). It is torn between two conflicting "ways of representing [*Vorstellungsweisen*]": the "Universalists [*Universalisten*]" who seek to 'separate what is particular and give a separate account of it', and are therefore 'convinced and imagine that everything is always and everywhere there, even though in infinitely varied and manifold shape, and is also discoverable', and the "Singularists [*Singularisten*]" who 'keep the general in view while wanting to add and integrate what is particular'. They 'concede the main point' to the Universalists, but 'always want to find one exception where type [*Typus*] is not particularly marked'. This is represented in the natural sciences when biology, specifically "comparative anatomy" in this case, finds itself split between the distinct disciplines of "natural history" and "natural philosophy". The former remains Universalist in assuming that 'the variety of forms in the organic world is a *known* phenomenon,' and arranges phenomenon 'according to the forms that are observed and the characteristics that are *sought out* and recognised' and '*eliminating all that is arbitrary* insofar as possible'.<sup>28</sup> The fruitfulness of such an approach lies in the value of a fixed standard for comparison between the diverse and complex

---

26 J. W. von Goethe, 'Outline of a General Introduction to Comparative Anatomy, Commencing with Osteology', *CW12* p.117; J. W. von Goethe, 'The Content Prefaced', *CW12*, p.67; MR #430.

27 'What is exact about mathematics except exactitude? And this, is it not the result of an innate sense of truth?' (MR #607).

28 J. W. von Goethe, 'Outline of a General Introduction to Comparative Anatomy, Commencing with Osteology', *CW12* p.117.

transformations of phenomena. The “type” for the Universalist is therefore a universal and fixed form.

But this is effective only to the extent that it eliminates the contingent and the arbitrary, the very object pursued by “natural philosophy”, in its analysis of the structural interrelationships of chemical compounds and physical forces, with a Singularist attention to the ‘inner structure’ beyond the ‘surface appearance of forms’.<sup>29</sup> Because breaking down its object into constitutive parts is less problematic for what Goethe calls “unorganized matter” in chemistry than for the organized interrelationships of living organisms, this knowledge of inner structure is far more problematic for biology as the science of life. For building upward from the part to the whole fails to capture – indeed it destroys – the special unity of the living thing, as Kant’s third *Critique* made clear.

Goethe praises the Singularists for seeking out the exceptional, but he criticises their approach for jettisoning the “type” altogether, based upon their misunderstanding of its character as a basic form [*Grundgestalt*] and for denying its existence when it is hidden. Osteology, for example, is deprived of a ‘promising approach’ with its ‘indirect denial of the type [*Typus*]’, which accounted for its previous incapacity to perceive physiological similarities between humans and apes.<sup>30</sup> In ‘wonder[ing] if another path – a better one – might not open up for me,’ Goethe sought to ground his new science of “morphology” in a concept of “type” that transcends the limitations of the Universalist and Singularist approaches. For whilst a use of a “type” is necessary for grasping the ‘constructive interrelationship’ of parts that so troubled Kant’s concept of “natural purposes”, this concept should not be understood as some fixed and universal form. Goethe preferred to speak of “formation [*Bildung*]” over “structured form [*Gestalt*]”, which describes ‘the end product and what is in process of production as well’ and does not ‘exclude what is changeable and assume that an interrelated whole is identified, defined, and fixed in character’.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, in a discussion of the problem of “natural purpose” in Kant’s treatment of living organisms, Goethe opposes those concepts which offer a purely formal solution because ‘there is always a material quality about such an organic substance’.<sup>32</sup> His schematic outline therefore interposes ‘power’, ‘force’ and ‘striving’ as an interpenetration of matter and form in life.

‘Impelled from the start by an inner need,’ Goethe says that he ‘had striven unconsciously and incessantly toward primal image and archetypes, and had even

---

29 Ibid., p.117; J. W. von Goethe, ‘Observation on Morphology in General’, *CW12* p.58.

30 J. W. von Goethe, ‘Outline of a General Introduction to Comparative Anatomy, Commencing with Osteology’, *CW12* p.124.

31 J. W. von Goethe, ‘The Purpose Set Forth (From On Morphology)’, *CW12* p.63.

32 J. W. von Goethe, ‘The Formative Impulse’, *CW12* p.35.

succeeded in building up a method of representing it which conformed to nature'.<sup>33</sup> Importantly, Goethe does not attempt to determine and conceptualise the apparent freedom of "natural purpose" that so troubled Kant's third *Critique*, but instead employs the "type" as a mode of aesthetically grasping the inner structure of living things across its various transformations. This is evident in Goethe's description of the "leaf" as the primal organ of the plant. The capacity for "multivalence" in the sequence of organs produced by a plant and for "intermediacy" between these forms lead Goethe to suggest an 'underlying kindship...of leaves, calyx, corolla, and stamens, which develop after one another, and, as it were, from one another' according to a 'process, by which one and the same organ presents itself to our eyes under protean forms...'.<sup>34</sup> Whilst Kant despaired as to how a later organ could be the paradoxical cause of an earlier one, Goethe demonstrated that 'the protean organs of the vegetating and flowering plant' possess an underlying identity, originating in 'a single organ, *the leaf*'.<sup>35</sup> This identity is neither that of a genetic realism, in which the actual, empirical leaf is the common ancestor of the more evolved organs, nor the generic nominalism of an abstract concept of fixed and common features. The "leaf" stands in for a 'general word [*ein allgemeine Wort*] to describe this organ' which is 'descriptive of the standard against which to compare the various manifestations [*Erscheinungen*] of its form [*Gestalt*]'. It is utilised with the 'reservation that we accustom ourselves to relate the phenomenon to one another in *both directions*', since the 'sepal is a contracted stem leaf' as much as the 'stem is a sepal, expanded through the intrusion of cruder saps'.<sup>36</sup> In his later scientific writings, Goethe develops this concept of the "type [*Typus*]", speaking of the "archetype" [*Urbild*] and later of the "primal phenomenon [*Urphänomen*]" as the experience of this unity of ideal type and particular manifestation.

The orientation of such a perspective can be seen in Goethe's description of morphology as 'a science new not because of its subject matter...but because of its intention and method, which lend its principles their unique form'. This intention, he adds, is 'to portray rather than explain'.<sup>37</sup> The fundamental issue at stake in Goethe's philosophy might therefore be characterised as the development of an "aesthetics of science", and at the heart of this aesthetics lies the "type" as the embodiment of the characteristic, capable of expressing the true underlying content of object without

---

33 J. W. von Goethe, 'Intuitive Judgement', *CW12* pp.31-2.

34 J. W. von Goethe, 'The Metamorphosis of Plants', *Goethe's Botany: The Metamorphosis of Plants and Tobler's Ode to Nature*, ed. Agnes Arber, (Waltham, Mass., Chronica Botanica, 1946), §§3-4.

35 Ibid., §120.

36 Ibid., §129.

37 J. W. von Goethe, 'Observation on Morphology in General', *CW12* p.57.

resorting to an abstract concept of universal form.<sup>38</sup> The scientific “type” or “archetype” therefore corresponds in many respects to the characteristic which Lukács praises so highly in Goethe’s “bourgeois classicism”. Lukács does not reflect upon the methodology of “portrayal” outside of the context of literary realism, but it is likely that it is Goethe’s scientific research, particular is search for the “primal plant” whilst in Italy in the late 1780s, which provokes his turn from *Sturm und Drang* to classicism.

#### 2.4 The Scientific Genius: Imagination and Production

The implicit philosophical context of Goethe’s attempt to formulate a more speculative metaphysics of nature in contrast to that of Kant is of fundamental importance to Benjamin’s construction of a higher concept of experience with his concept of criticism. This is apparent not only from the esoteric afterword on Goethe in the dissertation on Romanticism – which begins, it should be noted, with a quote from Goethe’s material for the *Theory of Colour* – but can be surmised from the oblique references to the epistemological structure of the Goethean “Ideal” in the ‘Epistemo-Critical Prologue’ to the *Origin of the German Tragic Drama* (written in 1924-5, published 1927). Benjamin claims there that the concept of *Ursprung* he introduces in the work – and which he distinguishes from Cohen’s own logical *Ursprung* – may be formulated using ‘Goethe’s term, ideals’, insisting that the ‘Ideas...are the Faustian “Mothers”’.<sup>39</sup> Again, the work is introduced with a quotation from Goethe’s theory of science, this time one which raises the explicit question of the relationship between art and science. This centrality is also confirmed in the later *Arcades Project*, which admits that, ‘In studying Simmel’s presentation of Goethe’s concept of truth, I came to see very clearly that my concept of *Ursprung* in the *Trauerspiel* book is a rigorous and decisive transportation of this basic Goethean concept from the domain of nature to that of history’ (AP N2a, 4).<sup>40</sup>

For Benjamin, what Goethe’s writings on science explore is the possibility of a metaphysical experience of truth. The emphasis that Benjamin places upon the intuition

---

38 Goethe ‘deployed a novel mode of writing...in order to re-enact in language at least something of the complex interchange in natural and cultural processes, while at the same time describing with eminent clarity the character of its products’ (R. H. Stephenson, ‘Binary Synthesis: Goethe’s Aesthetic Intuition in Literature and Science’, *Science in Context*, 18, 4, (2005), 2); Cf. also R. H. Stephenson, *Goethe’s Conception of Knowledge and Science*, op. cit., p.3.

39 Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* [hereafter *OGT*], trans. John Osborne, (London, Verso, 1998), p.35.

40 The apparent delay in what Beatrice Hanssen calls this ‘moment of belated revelation’ is surprising, since not only was Benjamin attending Simmel’s lectures at the Friedrich Wilhelm University in Berlin at the time Simmel’s book on Goethe was first published in 1913, but more importantly his early writings reflect a complex engagement with not only Goethe’s literary work but also his philosophy of science, culminating in the biographical sketch written for the Great Soviet Encyclopaedia in the late 1920s (Beatrice Hanssen, ‘Philosophy at Its Origin: Walter Benjamin’s Prologue to the *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*’, *MLN*, Comparative Literature Issue, 110, 4, (September, 1995), p.825).

of a pure content accords with Goethe's transformation of Kantian philosophy through the insistence that the *Urphänomen* is not an Idea of pure reason but an *experience* [*Erfahrung*]. Although at first Goethe describes the anatomical archetype [*anatomische Typus*] as 'in essence, the concept or idea [*den Begriff, die Idee*] of the animal' in the 'Outline of a General Introduction to Comparative Anatomy', when he first sketches out his "symbolic plant" for Schiller as part of his 'enthusiastic description of the metamorphosis of plants', he rejects the explanation given that it is a Kantian Idea [*Idee*].<sup>41</sup> If it is an Idea and not an experience [*Erfahrung*], Goethe claims, then '...I may rejoice that I have ideas without knowing it, and can even see them with my own eyes'.<sup>42</sup> This insistence on the inherently aesthetic aspect – what R. H. Stephenson describes as the conviction that 'meaning is intrinsically sensuous' – demands that the ideal "type" be distinguished from the transcendental idea of pure reason, as Schiller sought to do'.<sup>43</sup> Yet Goethe's subsequent and intensive study of Kant also indicates the extent to which the concept of the transcendental still assumes an important role within his thought.

Goethe will later, in the context of art, speak of the necessity for a 'Critique of the Senses [*Sinne*]' in the manner of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (MR #468). He comes to speak of this as 'a higher empiricism [*höhere Empirie*]' which relates to nature 'as human reason relates to practical life', that is, in a transcendental sense (MR #411). The distinction between an 'ordinary intuition [*Gewöhnliches Anschauen*]' and a 'pure intuition [*reines Anschauen*]' in Goethe's work must therefore be distinguished from Kant's mathematical-geometrical pure intuition of space and time in the first *Critique*, and associated instead with the kind of 'pure experience [*reinen Erfahrung*]' which would be derived from a transcendental deduction of ordinary experience in a "critique of pure sensibility" (MR ##533 & 1226).

Suggesting that Kant had adopted a 'roguishly ironic way of working', Goethe embraces the very problem of the speculative intuition in the *Critique of Judgement* by endorsing it as an 'intuitive perception of eternally creative nature'. He cites as 'particularly significant' for this transformation the account given by Kant of the *intellectus archetypus*.<sup>44</sup> Since Kant permitted the Idea of freedom to appear within consciousness as a fact of reason, Goethe suggests, the "freedom" of nature so problematic in Kant's account of natural purpose might be something itself given in experience, and not simply imposed upon the organism as a consequence of the contingency of its indeterminate particularity. Moving beyond Goethe's own description,

---

41 J. W. von Goethe, 'The Content Prefaced', *CW12* p.69; J. W. von Goethe, 'Fortunate Encounter', *CW12* pp.19-20.

42 Ibid., pp.19-20.

43 R. H. Stephenson, *Goethe's Conception of Knowledge and Science*, op. cit., p.50; MR #468.

44 J. W. von Goethe, 'Judgement Through Intuitive Perception', *CW12* pp.31-2.



we might call this an analogous “fact of experience”, appearing as an imperative for expression within consciousness. Benjamin understands the concept of experience contained in Goethe’s tender empiricism in this way when he defines its object as ‘pure contents...in principle only intuitable’, which announce themselves ‘in the feelings as pure’, and which are sensed as a ‘necessity that the content...become completely perceptible’ (CC 180).

In this context, and in relation to his sketch for Schiller of the “primal plant [Urpflanze]” as a concrete convergence of Idea and Experience, Goethe’s description of his capacity to ‘imagine a flower in the centre of my visual sense’, whose ‘original form never stayed for a moment; it unfolded, and from within it new flowers continuously developed...’ becomes significant.<sup>45</sup> He calls such products ‘fantasy flowers’, insisting however that they are ‘as regular as rosettes carved by a sculptor’. The use of the term “fantasy” here indicates an involvement of the imagination, in the same sense that Kant speaks of the ‘imagination, insofar as it produces imaginings involuntarily as well, is called *fantasy*...’.<sup>46</sup> Goethe elsewhere describes this as an ‘exact sensorial imagination [exakte sinnliche Phantasie]’, one which is indispensable to art and serves a fundamental role in his own scientific attempt to render pure content perceptible through its aesthetic and image-creating function.<sup>47</sup>

In the *Critique of Judgement*, the role of the imagination – as an intermediary power capable of mediating between concepts of the understanding and sensible intuitions – is given an expanded role by Kant analogous to that performed on judgement. Prior to the third *Critique*, judgement had been seen as primarily involved with the subsumption of particular sensible intuitions under universal concepts of the understanding. The capacity for inductive reasoning within natural science, however, suggests a more reflective role for judgement, which is capable of finding hypothetical laws for the subsumption of particular sensible intuitions not themselves determined by the understanding. It does so by indirectly borrowing principles of pure reason to stand in for concepts within the understanding. In the biological experience of living organisation, the receptivity of our merely “ectypal” or derivative understanding is dependent upon the images supplied by sensibility, meaning our cognition of the organism involves a form derived from the spatially unified image of the whole in relation to the parts. Because this contradicts any mechanical explanation, and because we are not supplied with any other

---

45 J. W. von Goethe, ‘From a review of Johannes Purkinje’s Sight from a Subjective Standpoint’, quoted in Douglas Miller, ‘Introduction’, *CW12* p.xxi.

46 Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. Robert B. Louden, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006), *Ak.* 167.

47 J. W. von Goethe, ‘From a review of Ernst Stiedenroth’s A Psychology in Clarification of Phenomena from the Soul’, *CW12* p.46.

adequate concept of form, we can only judge in accordance with regulative principle of purpose supplied by reason and understood as a formal and final cause (*CJ Ak.* 408). Since this is only an appearance of form for us, however, Kant insists that our need for such a teleological explanation does not logically contradict the simultaneous possibility of a mechanical one. We can negatively posit an intuitive type of understanding as a power of complete spontaneity, which is capable of an intellectual intuition of the thing-in-itself outside of the spatial form supplied of our sensibility, and therefore hypothetically capable of proceeding directly from the intuition of a determinate universal to the particular parts.

Reflective judgement is at work not only in subsuming intuitions of living organisation under borrowed teleological principles of pure practical reason, but also as the experience of beauty in the reflective judgement of taste. However, the feeling of beauty can also be reproduced by the imagination in its expanded role as a productive power capable of finding sensible expression for the Ideas of pure reason. Like judgement, therefore, Kant extends the role of the imagination in the third *Critique* through a relationship with not only the understanding but now also pure reason. Unlike reflective judgement, however, Kant restricts the role to the artistic genius, and denies it any place in scientific knowledge. For Kant, the genius is able to imitate the beauty of nature through the unconscious production of artefacts which are animated by what he terms the Aesthetic Idea. Kant assigns this role to the “fantasy” of the productive imagination, which he distinguishes from merely reproducing in recollection, but which he insists is incapable of creating a ‘presentation of sense that was *never* before given to our power of sense’.<sup>48</sup> In calling the products of such presentations Ideas, Kant makes it clear that by ‘striv[ing] toward something that lies beyond the bounds of experience’, they ‘hence try to approach an exhibition of rational concepts’, i.e. concepts of pure reason (*CJ Ak.* 314). Because such “Ideas” are nonetheless sensibly exhibited, Kant calls them Aesthetic Ideas, defining them as a ‘presentation of the imagination which compels [*veranlaßt*] much thought, but to which no determinate thought whatsoever, i.e., no [determinate] *concept*, can be adequate’: an unexpoundable ‘*intuition* (of the imagination)’ for which the understanding can find no ‘adequate concept’ (*CJ Ak.* 314, trans. altered).

Despite the symmetry between reflective judgements of art and science, Kant restricts the role of Aesthetic Ideas to the artist, insisting that the genius for exhibiting such Ideas is ‘a talent for art, not for science’, since science must ‘start from distinctly known rules that determine the procedure we must use in it’ (*CJ Ak.* 313-4). At the core

---

48 *CJ Ak.* 314; Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology*, op. cit., *Ak.* 167-8.

of this distinction is the claim that Aesthetic Ideas ‘cannot be brought about by any compliance with rules, whether of science or mechanical imitation, but can be brought about only by the subject’s nature’ (*CJ Ak.* 317-8). Goethe certainly disagrees with Kant that scientific procedure is thoroughly determined in advance by distinctly known rules of investigation, but he does so on the basis of a rejection of Kant’s latter claim, that genius belongs only to the subjective nature of the artist. His “occasional poetry” is an *objective* poetry, he argues, because like his objective thinking in science it is based upon the material permeation of the subject by the object of investigation. ‘The phenomenon of the after-image [*Nachbilder*]’, which are the residual traces of this physical contact, as well as ‘memory, productive imagination, concept and idea must all be in play at once’, he argues, ‘and be manifest in the vivacity of the organ of perception, with complete freedom and without purpose or guidance’.<sup>49</sup> Goethe describes this as planting a seed in the imagination which only later yields fruitful results, ‘offering them up of its own accord’.<sup>50</sup> At the centre of Goethe’s disagreement with Kant, therefore, is an alternative understanding of the Aesthetic Idea, which is effectively coded by the concept of the *Urphänomen* in his work.

According to Kant, the Aesthetic Idea is the product of the imagination when it strives either to ‘give sensible expression to rational ideas of invisible beings’ or else to give things ‘exemplified in experience [*Erfahrung*]...sensible expression in a way that goes beyond the limits of experience [*Erfahrung*], namely, with a completeness for which no example can be found in nature (*CJ Ak.* 314). In the former a rational idea becomes sensibly animated through its imaginative conjunction with an aesthetic attribute, effectively serving as the symbolic expression of the transcendental and otherwise inexpressible Idea of pure reason.<sup>51</sup> The other kind of expression occurs when the imagination poetically expands that which is exemplified in nature towards a supersensible completeness. In the lines, “The sun flowed forth, as serenity flows from virtue,” the experience of sunlight is animated and expanded through the practical rational

---

49 J. W. von Goethe, *Die Schriften zur Naturwissenschaft*. (Weimar, Leopoldina, 1947-1970), Volume 1, 9, p.348, quoted in R. H. Stephenson, *Goethe’s Conception of Knowledge and Science*, op. cit., p.16 (cf. *ibid.*, pp.51 & 53).

50 J. W. von Goethe, ‘Significant Help’, *CW12* pp.40-1.

51 This would seem to be exemplified slightly later on in the lines, “Thus the sun, his daily course completed,/ Spreads one more soft light over the sky;/ And the last rays that he sends through the air/ Are the last sighs he gives the world for its well-being” (*CJ Ak.* 316). Here the poet is ‘animating his rational idea of a cosmopolitan attitude, even at the end of life, by means of an attribute which the imagination...conjoins with that presentations...’. In light of Kant’s description of supplying an Idea with an analogous sensible intuition through symbolic hypotyposis, this practice might be called “symbolic”, with the Aesthetic Idea a symbol in the sense of an indirect exhibition of a transcendental and otherwise inexpressible Idea of pure reason (*CJ Ak.* 351-2).

principle of virtue.<sup>52</sup> Here, the productive imagination conforms to that creative, restructuring act [*Schaffung*] which moves beyond ordinary [*alltäglich*], empirical [*empirische*] nature [*Natur*] to produce ‘another nature out of the material actually given [*anderen Natur aus dem Stoffe, den ihr die wirkliche gibt*]’ (CJ Ak. 314).

The supersensible element of this Aesthetic Idea is assumed, on the basis of Kant’s transcendental idealism, to be a pure rational form or principle. For Goethe, however, the *Urphänomen*, as a convergence of the real and the ideal, is conceived as the sensible expression produced through a tender empiricism of the supersensible material of pure content, given *objectively* to the subject in intuition. It involves the portrayal of that ‘unknown [*unbekanntes*] quality of lawfulness in the object which corresponds to the unknown quality of lawfulness in the subject’ (MR #1344). The involvement that Goethe assigns to the imagination in his account of scientific experiment is therefore intended to counter not only the division between sensibility and reason in Kant’s philosophy, but also between the artist and the scientist. For Kant it is the practical “creation” (since subjective, individual and unconscious) of art which distinguishes it from the epistemological passivity of science (including natural science) as the accumulation of knowledge. In gesturing towards the possibility of the scientific genius, Goethe’s tender empiricism therefore rests upon a different understanding of the “productivity” of the imagination, and therefore of “production” itself. This difference proves crucial to Benjamin’s own critique of Goethean science.

## 2.5 *Urphänomen* and Experienceability (I): Art

In the opening sections of the ‘Epistemo-Critical Prologue,’ Benjamin implicitly conjoins his appropriation of the Goethean archetypes as ‘Faustian “Mothers” [which] remain obscure so long as phenomena do not declare their faith and gather around them’ with the erotic *anamnesis* described in Plato’s *Symposium*: ‘An understanding of the Platonic view of the relationship between truth and beauty is...indispensable to the definition of truth itself’ (OGT 35 & 30). For, he argues, ‘the innermost question of the *Symposium*’ concerns the beautiful as the appearance of truth for the lover who seeks it, and truth as a process of revelation capable of guaranteeing the existence of the beautiful (OGT 31). In this appeal to the *Symposium*, Benjamin implicitly distances his aesthetic Platonising of Kant from Cohen’s neo-Kantian valorization of the *Republic*’s privileging of the pure

---

52 These two poetic applications of the Aesthetic Idea and its attributes also seem to mirror structurally the different relations between nature and freedom in the two parts of the *Critique of Judgement*. The feeling of beauty which accompanies our apprehension of nature is described by Kant as the symbol of the good, just as it is the principle of moral freedom which animates our experience of natural organisation to produce a reflective Idea of divine natural purpose.

intelligibility of scientific laws conceived as *technai*. It rejects the logical dialectic to which Cohen restricts his concept of *Ursprung*, emphasising the Kantian account of Aesthetic Ideas in order to distance the grasping of such truth from any intellectual intuition of the Idea itself. This approach is described not as a vision – even an intellectual vision – of the subject in relation to an object which stands apart from it, but a ‘total immersion and absorption’ into truth (*OGT* 36).

However, Benjamin distinguishes this absorption from the Romantic concept of the “experiment” when he insists that their attempt to renew the Platonic theory of ideas is frustrated by their concept of truth as one of ‘reflective consciousness’ (*OGT* 38). The contrast merely implied in ‘The Concept of Criticism’ between the differing character of intuition in the Romantic and the Goethean theory of experiment can therefore be made explicit. To the extent that the concept of experiment in Early German Romanticism involves the dissolution of the absolute difference between subject and object, this nonetheless takes place within the context of knowledge, specifically the self-knowledge of pure form of thinking itself. The intuition that Benjamin discovers in Goethe’s tender empiricism, however, is that of an *objective* thinking which concerns itself not with knowledge but an “experienceability” or “perceptibility” of the pure contents of the object.

This distinction is useful for clarifying the claim made by several recent commentators that it is phenomenology that provides the ‘conceptual language able to describe Goethe’s way of science accurately’.<sup>53</sup> Whilst Edmund Husserl’s phenomenological project arises in response to the same scientific problematic which receives paradigmatic expression in Kant’s *Critique of Judgement*, his proposal to ‘go back to the “things themselves”’ proceeds with a very different intention from Goethe’s. Husserl’s late essay on *The Crisis of the European Sciences* clearly shares with Goethe’s project what has been described as a ‘deep mistrust of the mathematization of nature’ which is countered through ‘a patient, participatory presence to phenomena’ in which ‘the fullness of the world reveals itself in new and surprising ways’.<sup>54</sup> But Husserl’s ‘essential

---

53 David Seamon, ‘Goethe, Nature and Phenomenology: An Introduction’, *Goethe’s Way of Science: A Phenomenology of Nature*, ed. David Seamon & Arthur Zajonc, (New York, SUNY, 1998), p.1.

54 Eva-Maria Simms, ‘Goethe, Husserl, and the Crisis of the European Sciences’, *Janus-Head*, 8, 1, (2005), p.163. This similarity is perhaps most apparent in Husserl’s notes on *The Crisis of the European Sciences* from the mid-1930s, where his characterization of the phenomenological method appears to borrow Goethe’s own morphological description of the essential plant structure. ‘All objective consideration of the world is consideration of the “exterior” and grasps only “externals,” objective entities’, Husserl argues, before opposing to this a ‘radical contemplation of the world’ which is a ‘systematic and pure internal consideration of the subjectivity which “expresses” itself in the exterior’. Husserl compares this to the problem of grasping the unity of a living organism, and seems to draw on Goethe’s own morphological account in the *Metamorphosis of Plants* when he describes a method ‘in

intuition [*Wesenerschauung*]', in contrast to Goethe's 'intuitive judgement [*Anschauung Urteilskraft*]', draws on a model of abstraction as a 'descriptively peculiar experience, responsible for setting the abstract content in relief from its concrete background' – such as the capacity to 'directly apprehend the Specific Unity *Redness* on the basis of a singular intuition of something red' – in order to construct a broader linguistic account of "meaning" whose ultimate intention is to preserve the status of pure logical concepts.<sup>55</sup> Husserl's real interest is not so much with things, or even the experience of things, but with how the 'relation between a significant expression (in a particular speech act) and the ideal unity of meaning is *like* that between the Species Red and a red object of intuitive experience'.<sup>56</sup>

Similarly, the bracketing of the "real" transcendence of the object in phenomenological reduction merely serves to rediscover a sphere of immanence in the subject, understood as 'absolute givenness of what is simply seen' in the certain knowledge of Cartesian self-reflection.<sup>57</sup> Goethe does sometimes speak of a disinterested approach towards the scientific object which, in an even more radical version of Kant's judgement of taste, renounces the 'natural way of seeing and judging things' in their relation to oneself and one's own 'yardstick of pleasure and displeasure, attraction and repulsion, help and harm'.<sup>58</sup> But in distinction to Husserl's phenomenological bracketing, the intention of such a 'gaze' is to 'find the measure for what he learns, the data for judgement, not in himself but in the sphere of what he observes'. In contrast to the "objectivity" discovered in the self-presence of Husserlian intentionality, Goethe argues

---

which one can certainly consider and dissect from the outside but which one can understand only if one goes back to its hidden roots and systematically pursues the life which in all its accomplishment, is in them and strives upward from them, shaping from within'. The comparison with Goethe's morphological approach in *The Crisis of the European Sciences*, concludes that since, 'the place where all problems of living inner being and of external exhibition are to be decided is in the end our human being, and the life of consciousness belonging to it', an investigation of the phenomenological structure of consciousness is necessary and a transcendental bracketing of our natural prejudices regarding the external world (Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr, (Evanston, Illinois, Northwestern University Press, 1989), pp.113-4).

55 Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, trans. J. N. Findlay, (London & New York, Routledge, 2001), Volume II, Investigation 2, pp.310-1 & 312. For Husserl's linguistic account of meaning cf. Volume II, Investigation 1, p.168. Because in his later account of eidetic variation Husserl is perhaps closest to Goethe's own methodology, and this in part arises as a criticism of the concept of experience in his earlier work, this last aspect of Husserl's phenomenology will be considered in the next chapter.

56 Ibid., Volume II, Investigation 2, p.237 [emphasis added]. The 'basic foundations of logic and epistemology' are therefore to be taken as 'valid thought-unities', grasped as the ideal intentions of communication and assured by 'defending the intrinsic right of specific (or ideal) objects to be granted objective status' (ibid., Volume II, Investigation 1, pp.168 & 237).

57 Edmund Husserl, *On the Idea of Phenomenology*, trans. Lee Hardy, (AA Dordrecht, The Netherlands, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), pp.26 & 30.

58 J. W. von Goethe, 'The Experiment as Mediator between Object and Subject', *CW12* p.11.

that the Socratic injunction to “know thyself” is nothing less than ‘a deception practiced...to divert attention from activity in the outer world to some false, inner speculation’.<sup>59</sup> It is ‘our fellow men’ that know us best, that ‘know us better than we ourselves can’. This latter point makes it clear that Husserlian phenomenology has more in common with the Fichtean context of self-knowledge in Early German Romanticism than the objective thinking of the Goethean experiment. Fritz Heinemann’s 1934 essay on ‘Goethe’s Phenomenological Method’ emphasises a number of fundamental differences between Goethe’s phenomenology and Husserl’s doctrine which are relevant in this respect. Most notably, Goethe’s science does not begin with a transcendental reduction, it does not ‘desert the sphere of concrete consciousness in order to construct its system upon this plane’, it does not ‘perform any “eidetic reduction”’, and, unlike Husserl’s, its principles ‘have reference to content, and can never be completely resolved into relations of pure form’.<sup>60</sup> Joanna Hodge has therefore suggested that Benjamin’s ‘return to Goethe to theorize phenomena might also be taken as an oblique critique of the move in Husserlian phenomenology towards an idealism, which sacrifices the absolute priority of pre-predicative experience’.<sup>61</sup>

Whilst Goethe substitutes Kant’s mechanistic Newtonian view of the plant for that of an underlying but dynamic identity and continuity, the value of this endeavour lies less in its attention to the “leaf” as protean organ and more in what is at stake in the methodological intention of this transformation. The tender empiricism of Goethe’s way of science, particularly in the *Metamorphosis of Plants* but also in the *Theory of Colour*, is responding to precisely the problem of experience which so troubles Kant’s *Critique of Judgement*, and encapsulates the struggle to express the kind of experience which would be capable of incorporating the ephemeral, the contingent and the particular into scientific knowledge. However, as the earlier discussion of the Goethean intuition of pure content in ‘The Concept of Criticism’ and in ‘Goethe’s *Elective Affinities*’ noted, Benjamin also criticises Goethe for reducing “style” to the historically limited truth of classical realism and, as a consequence this neglect of any historical consideration of artistic form, for imagining that science could be turned directly into an art via an analogously conceived realism of the *Urphänomen* as archetypal. The “type” or “archetype” therefore offers little

---

59 J. W. von Goethe, ‘Significant Help Given by an Ingenious Turn of Phrase’, *CW12* p.39.

60 Fritz Heinemann, ‘Goethe’s Phenomenological Method’, *Philosophy*, 9, 33, (January, 1934), p.80.

61 Joanna Hodge, ‘The Timing of Elective Affinity: Walter Benjamin’s Strong Aesthetics’, *Walter Benjamin and Art*, ed. Andrew Benjamin, (London & New York, Continuum, 2005), p.23. Hodge’s conclusion, that ‘Goethe’s writings give Benjamin access to such a pre-predicative experience which is not susceptible to any displacement in favour of a return to platonism, repressed or explicit’, must be qualified by distinguishing between Benjamin’s appropriation of an “aesthetic” Plato and his rejection of an “gnoseological” Socrates as argued in the following Section.

more than a re-description of the empirical phenomenon, now viewed through its most typifying aspect. Goethe therefore took the sphere of “true nature” represented through aesthetic style to be ‘identical with the realm of archetypes or *Urphänomen* or ideals’ which is the object of science (CC 180). His conflation of artistic form with classical realism (distinguished by Goethe from naturalism) enables him to substitute an artistic for a scientific realism, without questioning the limitations of scientific form itself. The concept of experience introduced in his scientific writings therefore raises a profound and valuable philosophical insight into aesthetic representation, but it is problematically pursued within the context of scientific knowledge. Rejecting any such possibility in his essay on Romanticism, Benjamin insists that ‘the concept of intuition would perhaps contribute nothing’ to the question of ‘how nature appears to science’ (CC 180).

The concept of intuition, rather, must remain within the theory of art, such that the archetypes must be understood as residing ‘in that *sphere of art* where art is not creation but nature’ (CC 180; emphasised added). The truth of nature which is made visible in art, therefore, ‘must be rigorously distinguished from that [visible] nature on a conceptual level’, which suggests the ‘paradoxical resolution’ that ‘true, intuitable, *Urphänomenal* nature would become visible after the fashion of a likeness, not in the nature of the world but *only* in art, whereas in the nature of the world it would indeed be present but hidden (that is, overshadowed by what appears)’ (CC 181). What is “true” about such a nature is expressed not by the content itself – as if pure content could be expressed as visible content (in which case, it could conceivably be expressed in the phenomenon itself) – but in its *way of appearing*, specifically the particular presentational form of its representation (which in part also expresses the impossibility for its phenomenally appearing). The “true nature” discerned by Goethe appears as such only for art and not for science, since only the forms of art have the capacity to express this hidden perceptibility of the content. Goethe’s concept of experience derives from his great *artistic* feeling for nature, and his attempt to impose this upon natural science with its own limitations renders it paradoxical and ultimately meaningless.

## 2.6 *Urphänomen* and Experienceability (II): Technology

Goethe’s insistence that ‘we must necessarily think of science as art if we are to derive any kind of wholeness from it’, which Benjamin utilises as the epigraph for his ‘Epistemo-Critical Prologue’, anticipates Nietzsche’s similar attempt in *The Birth of Tragedy* to ‘look at science in the perspective of the artist, but art in that of life’.<sup>62</sup> When

---

62 J. W. von Goethe, *Materialen zur Geschichte der Farbenlehre*, quoted in OGT p.27. Paul Bishop and R. H. Stephenson have argued for the important influence of Goethe’s philosophy (and Weimar Classicism in general) upon Nietzsche’s recognition of that task. ‘When this



Benjamin characterizes the Goethean ‘quintessence of pure contents’ as the ‘museworthy [*das Musische*]’ (meaning those ‘invisible – but evident – archetypes whose guardians the Greeks knew under the name of the Muses’), his phrase recalls Nietzsche’s criticism of the ‘optimistic dialectic’ of Socratic science for driving ‘*music* out of tragedy with the scourge of its syllogisms’, and his question as to whether ‘ever-new configurations of genius [*des Genius*]’ might lead to a ‘*music-practicing* [*des musiktreibenden*]’ or ‘artistic [*künstlerischen*] Socrates’.<sup>63</sup>

Benjamin rehearses Nietzsche’s criticism in his 1916 discussion of the *Symposium*, where he ridicules the ‘unartistic [*unmusisch*]’ character of Socrates, whilst praising Plato for struggling to creatively express ‘the young philosophy’.<sup>64</sup> Socrates transposes the imagery of female pregnancy directly into the spiritual domain, Benjamin argues, modelling intellectual creativity upon the biological and procreative functions of life and in doing so turning the erotic and the aesthetic into mere instruments of the intellect.<sup>65</sup> This requires Socrates to draw a sharp distinction between the *daemonic* philosopher and the *materialistic* craftsman, whose manipulation of the physical therefore rearranges, replaces and renews but does not create.<sup>66</sup> What Benjamin describes as the ‘daemonic

---

perspective, the *Kulturkampf* or “cultural struggle” waged by Goethe and Schiller, is overlooked, the framework, and hence the structure, of Nietzsche’s thinking is distorted to the point of unintelligibility. Once restored, however, this perspective opens up afresh the coherence and purposiveness in Nietzsche’s philosophical aesthetics’ (Paul Bishop & R. H. Stephenson, *Friedrich Nietzsche and Weimar Classicism*, (Rochester, NY, & Woodbridge, Suffolk, Camden House, 2005), p.1.

63 CC pp.179-180; Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Clifton P. Fadiman, (New York, Dover, 1995), pp.50-55.

64 Walter Benjamin, ‘Socrates’, *SWI* p.52.

65 As a consequence, ‘the spiritual was sexual through and through’ for Socrates: ‘His notion of spiritual conception is pregnancy; his notion of spiritual procreation is discharge of desire’ (Benjamin, ‘Socrates’, *SWI* p.53). For the philological and philosophical problems associated with this view that spiritual creativity in the *Symposium* employs metaphorical terms which are organised around ‘sex difference’ qua ‘biological necessity’ as a ‘transcendental or a priori ground...which is not itself amenable to interpretation or open to question’, cf. Stella Sanford, “‘All Human beings are pregnant’: the bisexual imaginary in Plato’s *Symposium*”, *Radical Philosophy*, 150, (July/August 2008), pp.24-35. Against this Sanford carefully examines the ‘literary and conceptual specificity and complexity of the metaphors’, whose ‘disregard for propriety of reference in relation to the male and the female’ comprise a ‘bisexual imaginary’ which suggests instead the very ‘problematization of the presumption of sex difference as transcendental or a priori ground’ (ibid., p.30). The distinction drawn by Nietzsche and Benjamin between the Socratic and Platonic voices in the text, however, is not of principle concern to Sanford’s argument, and the attribution of this bisexual imaginary to one or the other is not made.

66 Plato, *Symposium*, trans. M. C. Howatson, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008), 202e-203e. The “man of spirit [*daimonios*]” is inspired by Eros, a ‘great spirit [*daimon*]...intermediate between god and mortal’, whereas the “materialistic person [*banausos*]” is merely wise in skill [*technē*] or craft [*cheirourgia*]. Benjamin himself utilises the *Symposium*’s myth of *eros* in his theory of fate and freedom in the ‘Outline of the Psychophysical Problem’, expanding upon its personification of Eros as a spiritual mediator in order to emphasise its binding role between humans and the divine, one which permits a divinatory communication to occur as a form of interpretation (Walter Benjamin, ‘Outline of the Psychophysical Problem’, *SWI* p.400).

indistinguishability' of Socrates' talk in the *Symposium* derives from this intermingling of biological and essential nature, which Socrates can then only distinguish by reifying the material and the intellectual spheres of productivity.<sup>67</sup>

Benjamin accuses Goethe's of sharing this 'idea of the daemonic', which he had named 'after the example of the ancients and others who had perceived something similar', and which asserts itself in his scientific relation to the natural world (*GEA* 316). As we have seen, Goethe's scientific misunderstanding of the *Urphänomen* leads to a mythical ambiguity between "nature" and "true nature", but Benjamin insists that truth is not 'the object of knowledge', for the 'structure of truth...demands a mode of being which in its lack of intentionality resembles the simple existence of thing...' (*OGT* 36). This mode of being is described as 'primordial form of perception' comparable to Platonic anamnesis and to Adamic Naming in which words appear unimpaired by cognitive meaning and therefore as a material, thing-like or even living existence.<sup>68</sup> Benjamin discerns in Goethe's later artistic works a 'struggle to free himself' from the clutches of daemonic myth, and in his literature from the *Elective Affinities* (1809) onwards – including *From my Life: Truth and Poetry* (1811-1830), the *West-Eastern Divan* (1819), and the second part of *Faust* (1832) – Benjamin discerns 'a purer promise, no matter how darkly the myth holds sway in it' (*GEA* 327).

Like Nietzsche, Benjamin contrasts the intellectual-erotic practice of Socrates from that artistic creativity of Plato, calling the 'Platonic view of the relationship of truth and beauty' in the *Symposium* one that is 'indispensable to the definition of truth itself'.<sup>69</sup>

---

67 Walter Benjamin, 'Socrates', *SWI* p.62.

68 This stands in contrast to Lukács's description of the Platonic dialogue as a 'significance-supposing' form of portrayal, because it concerns itself with questions regarding the existence of concepts and values, which it takes as the 'sole true realities' over that of things. The 'really profound criticism' of Plato, as well as mysticism, 'resolutely reject the image...reach out most passionately for what lies beyond the image': in their writings 'there is no life of things, no image, only transparency, only something that no image would be capable of expressing completely', which Lukács calls an "imagelessness of all images".

69 *OGT* p.30. Plato's *Symposium* has a particular importance in Benjamin's early writings, and is specifically referred to in the texts 'Socrates' ('In the *Symposium*, Socrates praises the love between men and youths and lauds it as the medium of creative spirit...[But] ought Platonic love to mean un-Socratic love?' (Walter Benjamin, 'Socrates', *SWI* pp.53-4)), 'The Theory of Criticism' ('Plato's *Symposium*, at its climax, deals with this topic. Its message is that beauty achieves this virtual manifestation only within the truth as a whole' (Walter Benjamin, 'The Theory of Criticism', *SWI* p.219), 'Goethe's *Elective Affinities*' ('...the Platonic theory of the beautiful is connected with the still older problem of semblance, since, according to the *Symposium*, it first of all addresses physically living beauty' (Walter Benjamin, 'Goethe's *Elective Affinities*' [hereafter *GEA*], *SWI* p.350), a letter to Florens Christian Rang ('In the *Symposium* and the *Timaeus*, Plato defined the scope of the theory of ideas as the domain of art and nature' (Walter Benjamin, Letter to Florens Christian Rang (dated December 9<sup>th</sup>, 1923), *SWI* p.389), the 'Outline of the Psychophysical Problem' ('Eros is the binding element in nature whose energies run free whenever he is not in control... "he is the mediator who spans the chasms which divides [the divine and the mortals]" [Plato, *Symposium*, op. cit., 202e]' (Walter Benjamin, 'Outline of the Psychophysical Problem', *SWI* p.400), and the 'Epistemo-

Platonic dialectic does not attempt to possess the true in an unmediated and conceptual way, but instead produces philosophical-dramatic dialogues whose beauty represents the truth by ‘mak[ing] visible not the idea but rather the latter’s secret’. But what Benjamin discerns as the purification of the daemonic into the genius does not leave the modern concept of artistic genius untouched.

Kant had already connected artistic genius (German: *Genie*) with its classical notion (Latin: *Genius*) by relating the inscrutable creativity of the artist to an innate natural talent, reflected in the ancient idea of ‘the guardian and guiding spirit that each person is given as his own at birth, and to whose inspiration [*Eingebung*] those original ideas are due’ (*CJ Ak.* 307-8). The attempt to develop a spiritual concept of experience in Benjamin’s earliest writings on the politics of youth invokes this association, investing the higher experience of youth with the spirit [*Geist*] of what he refers to in ‘The Metaphysics of Youth’ as the *Genius*. Benjamin specifically distances his theory of *Genius* from the formalist and idealist implications contained in Kant’s description of the artist, calling the artistic *Genie* one who is ‘forgetful and at a loss’ and whose conversation has ‘utterly cursed his memory in giving it shape’.<sup>70</sup> By connecting his account of the *Genius* with *das Musische* Benjamin invokes this classical notion of the collective, productive inspiration of a person, group or place. But this remains tied to a dogmatic kind of spiritual expression in his earliest writings, and where he does draw upon examples of artistic practice they are primarily associated with the bourgeois and literary models of Goethe, Schiller, Stefan George and Hölderlin.

However, whilst in his early writings Benjamin criticises Goethe for ambiguously conflating nature as ‘the sphere of perceptible phenomenon and that of intuitable archetypes’, and insists that ‘only in the domain of art do the *Urphänomen* – as ideals – present themselves adequately to perception’, in a later review of Karl Blossfeldt’s *Primal Forms [Urformen] of Art: Photographic Plant-Images* (1928), he describes Blossfeldt’s photographs of magnified plant organs as visions in which ‘a geyser of new image-worlds hisses up at points in our existence where we would least have thought them imaginable’.<sup>71</sup> Benjamin now offers a more nuanced description of such “pure contents”, insisting such forms are not merely ‘originary forms of art’ in the sense of mere models, but ‘originary forms of nature...at work as originary forms in all that was created’. Here, then, it is the technological form of photographs that ‘reveal an entire, unsuspected horde of analogies and forms in the existence of plants’, as ‘inner image-imperatives [*Bildnotwendigkeiten*], which have the last word in all phases and stages of

---

Critical Prologue’ (‘This is evident above all in the Symposium...’) (*OGT* p.30)).

70 Walter Benjamin, ‘The Metaphysics of Youth’, *SWI* p.7.

71 *GEA* 315; Walter Benjamin, ‘News About Flowers’, *SW2* p.156.

things conceived as metamorphoses'. In contrast to New Objectivity [*Neue Sachlichkeit*] in art, Benjamin insists, photography therefore represents a 'truly new objectivity', which is anticipated by the 'fraternal great spirits – sun-soaked eyes, like those of Goethe and Herder...'.<sup>72</sup> He adds that 'this touches on the one of the deepest, most unfathomable forms of the creative, on the variant that was always, above all others, the form of genius, of the creative collective, and of nature...the fruitful, dialectical opposite of invention: the *Natura non facit saltus* of the ancients'.<sup>73</sup>

Here, then, the possible experience of a merely intuited "true nature" is not restricted to the realm of art, but granted to technology as a sphere capable of mediating the relationship between humanity and nature. In the final version of 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility', dating from the last years of the 1930s, Benjamin characterises this realm as 'another nature which speaks to the camera as compared to the eye', no longer informed by human consciousness but by the unconscious.<sup>74</sup> But even in the 'Outline of the Psychophysical Problem' from 1922-3, the claim that it is 'technology in which the unity of life is formed' suggests that whilst the realm of *Urphänomen* should be not be directly conflated with the visible nature of phenomenon, it is nonetheless in the whole realm of "second nature" and not merely that designated as art that the truth of nature may become perceptible for us.<sup>75</sup>

In a discussion of the *Critique of Judgement*, Howard Caygill argues that because of the 'historical limitations of his concept of technology', Kant recoiled from attributing any biological function to technology, which he 'still considered externally, as something that has motive but not formative power'.<sup>76</sup> As a consequence, Caygill claims, Kant was unable to fully think through the equivocation he discerned in the organistic character of living things and retreated from this insight to 'an extremely limited conception of the technic of nature as a regulative idea', leaving 'the source of organization or life inscrutable'. Yet Kant's reflections upon the causal reciprocity involved in natural purpose 'clearly points to a prosthetic negotiation between the inside and the outside of an organism', Caygill suggests, which threatened to turn the living thing into the 'ambiguous site of experience, both internal and external to mind and body'. If Goethe's morphological writings share the historical limitations of Kant's concept of technology, his struggle to overcome the Kantian theory of experience nonetheless lead him to conceptually anticipate the optical capacity of technology when he assigns all sorts of

---

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p.157.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., pp.156-7.

<sup>74</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility (Third Version)', *SW4* p.266.

<sup>75</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Outline of the Psycho-Physical Problem', *SWI* p.395.

<sup>76</sup> Howard Caygill, 'Stelarc and the Chimera: Kant's Critique of Prosthetic Judgement', *Art Journal*, 54, (Spring, 1997).

visionary insights to direct scientific observation.<sup>77</sup> As Benjamin became increasingly preoccupied and familiar with avant-garde art practices, he came to recognise and reassess this implicit feature of Goethe's work, and to reformulate his earlier rejection of Goethe's aesthetics of science. Awakened to the observatory and perceptual potential of new technological forms, Benjamin realises that the ambiguous concept of nature in Goethe's scientific writings anticipates a more general division between "first nature" and technology as a "second nature", which is brought into practice by the liquidation of bourgeois artistic practices in the work of the avant-garde.

The work of the European Surrealists and the Russian Constructivists effectively render Goethe's philosophy of science true, only now not as an "aesthetics of science" but as the scientific practice of art. More specifically, Goethe's tender empiricism can now be read as the aesthetic anticipation of the ontology of the photographic and cinematographic image, whereby that which is represented, through the process of production, becomes part of the material element of the object itself. Goethe's artistic fascination with the science of chemical and physical processes in his novel *Elective Affinities* has been frequently remarked upon, as has the influence of his *Theory of Colour*, whose research into the composition of light and the production of colour is thematically and chronologically close to the novel. What has received little attention is how these combined interests appear in the work as a fascination with the imagistic, in what might be understood as the conceptual anticipation in literature of the subsequent achievements of photographic and cinematographic technology.<sup>78</sup>

There are a number of moments in *Elective Affinities* which offer a literary anticipation of the photographic snapshot. Whilst a camera obscura features in the novel, used by the visiting English gentleman to draw pictures of the landscape on the estate, and a discussion of the use of portraits to commemorate the dead raises the strange mix of temporal presence and absence which comes to the fore in the photographic image, it is the production of *tableaux vivants* as the attempts to impose the forms of painterly composition directly onto real life by using people and objects as its material which are

---

77 That is, Goethe assigned to the unaided human eye all sorts of capacities which only find their true achievement in technology, whilst denying the most basic advantages of existing technology: 'The most disastrous aspect of modern physics: that experiments have been, as it were, segregated from the human factor and that nature is to be recognized only by the evidence of artificial...' and 'microscopes and telescopes really only serve to the unaided human senses...' (MR ##706 & 502).

78 In her discussion of Goethe, colour and technology in *Hollywood Flatlands* Esther Leslie points out how Edwin Land, the co-founder of the Polaroid Corporation, developed an 'astonishing new theory of colour' whose procedures he said were drawn from Goethe's theory of colour (Esther Leslie, *Hollywood Flatlands: Animation, Critical Theory, and the Avant-Garde*, (London & New York, Verso, 2004), p.252.

most suggestive in this respect.<sup>79</sup> 'It was at this moment that the picture [*das Bild*] appeared to have been held and fixed [*festgehalten und erstarrt*]', Goethe writes of one of these staged constructions, his description of the participants seeming to mirror the effect upon the spectators: 'Physically bedazzled [*Physisch geblendet*], spiritually astonished [*geistig überrascht*], the people standing around seemed to have just turned their eyes and to be in the act of looking back again in happy curiosity'.<sup>80</sup> For the effect of this material construction – Goethe describes it as 'presenting reality as image [*die Wirklichkeit als Bild*]' – is at once stunning and uncanny.<sup>81</sup>

The representation of the nativity scene, enacted as a *tableaux vivant* in the novel, taps into a tradition of iconography recognised by the character of the Architect in the novel, and whose relevance to the ontology of the photographic image is emphasised by Peter Osborne.<sup>82</sup> The *ikon* or theological image circumvents the modern notion of resemblance as copy to interpose an older notion of the image as 'a visual presentation of reality, at once sensuously particular and ideal', combining 'the aesthetic, spatio-temporal concretion of an object of sight with the element of ideality inherent in ideas'.<sup>83</sup> The chemical and optical process through which light from the object is imprinted onto light-sensitive surfaces lends the photographic image the specific ontological form of participation in 'the *being* of its referent', a "magical" aspect of photographic naturalism' which Osborne characterises as 'theological technology'.<sup>84</sup> Photography takes on the magical aspect of naming which is so pivotal to Benjamin's early work, and which Goethe sought in his use of the name "leaf" as a "primal phenomenon" for expressing the morphology of plants.

Goethe's fascination with a consequential feature of this ontology, what Osborne calls the 'immobalization of time' in the image, derives from his interest in the plastic

---

79 J. W. von Goethe, *Elective Affinities*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Penguin, 1971), p.232; *ibid.*, p.160; *ibid.*, p.202. In a discussion of graves and monuments, it is suggested that portraits should be taken in the prime of life to commemorate the subject when they are deceased. This uncouples the monument from its physical location and permits the commemoration to exist as 'an independent thing' able 'to stand in its own right'. But Ottilie questions the assumption of the fullness of this temporal presence, expressing an aversion to portraits because 'they point to something distant and departed and remind me how hard it is to do justice to present' (*ibid.*, p.160).

80 *Ibid.*, p.202.

81 *Ibid.* 'The figures correspond so well to their originals, the colours were so happily chosen, the lighting so artistic, you thought you had been transported to another world...', and Luciane's 'living copy' is later said to surpass the original. But the reality of the material produces an unsettling effect: the '...disturbing factor being a sort of anxiety produced by the presence of real figures instead of painted ones' (*ibid.*, pp.191-2).

82 '...he suddenly realised that the art of representing pictures by three-dimensional figures had actually originated in the so-called Crib, in the pious representation devoted...to the divine mother and child' (*ibid.*, p.201).

83 Peter Osborne, 'Sign and Image', *Philosophy in Cultural Theory*, (London & New York, Routledge, 2000), p.34.

84 *Ibid.*, pp.34-35.

style of classical art, notably *Laocoon*, which he praises for its portrayal of real movement as a fleeting moment.<sup>85</sup> In the ‘plastic arts’, Goethe argues, the ‘most sublime expression of pathos...is to be found in the transition from one condition to another’, exemplified in the ‘moment of sudden transition’ of ‘child running along, full of vitality and joy of life, who is suddenly struck hard by a playmate, or otherwise hurt physically or emotionally’.<sup>86</sup> The ‘new sensation has the impact of an electric shock on his entire body’, which produces a spiritual as well as physical effect in the observer. Goethe therefore describes the *Laocoon* as ‘an ideal subject’ because ‘struggling and suffering are combined in a single moment’: ‘I would describe the sculpture as a frozen lightning bolt, a wave petrified at the very instant it is about to break upon the shore’. The lightning bolt illuminates the scene like the photographic flash, interrupting the present like an electric shock in order to dialectically capture in a momentary image the very movement of transformation.

In the earlier discussion of Lukács’ concept of the “characteristic”, Goethe’s neoclassicism was distanced from any naturalism, and the element of construction which Goethe describes here in terms of sculpture is a case in point. The work has the semblance of nature, but for the connoisseur it is not the accuracy but the construction by the artist that is most appreciated and through which it goes beyond nature. He ‘sees not only the realism of what is imitated but also the excellence in the selection of subject matter, the imaginativeness in composition, and the supra-natural spirit of its micro-world of art’.<sup>87</sup> Goethe recognises but misunderstands the importance of the emerging commodity form for this appreciation. The ‘average art lover’ has no concept of its construction and mistakes its truth for a verisimilitude towards nature, Goethe suggests, treating ‘the work of art like a piece of merchandise’. Goethe’s point concerns the passive consumption of the work as “real” by the ‘average art lover’, which is contrasted with the appreciation of the ‘true connoisseur’ who ‘feels that he must rise to the level of the artist in order to enjoy the work of art, that he must live with it, must see it again and again, and thus achieve a higher level of awareness’. Again, Goethe’s understanding of aesthetic appreciation here seems to coincide with his description of tender empiricism. Yet in his aversion to technology – which he regards as disrupting the visual and material mediation between subject and object – Goethe misses the point that it will be in technology itself that the ‘higher level of awareness’ he sought is possible; that it is in the photographic reproduction of the work that it can be experienced ‘again and again’; in the photographic enlargement that a higher level of awareness is permitted; and that it is primarily as a

---

85 cf. *ibid.*, p.35.

86 J.W. Von Goethe, ‘On *Laocoon*’ (1798), *CW3* p.20.

87 J. W. von Goethe, ‘On Truth and Verisimilitude in Art’, *CW3* pp.77-8.

commodity that the spectator comes to “live with” the work.<sup>88</sup> Goethe sought to impose an artistic appreciation upon the forms of science, but what his tender empiricism anticipates is the way in which technology demands a scientific transformation of the work, the forms, and the experience of the sphere once delineated as art. This claim will be examined here in relation to the material construction and ontology of the work, explored in relation to photograph and construction. The conclusion of Chapter 4 returns to this theme, within the context of the Goethean dialectic discussed in that chapter, in relation to the experience of the moving or cinematographic image.

Goethe’s tender empiricism therefore anticipates the dialectical transformation of art through science and technology. This recognition seems to have struck Benjamin during his two month stay in Moscow in 1927, where he was writing a biography on Goethe for the *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia* as well as a study of the collective forms of life under socialism for *Die Kreatur*, and where he was exposed to the sweeping transformations of a collectively orientated art under socialism. Benjamin is clear that the roots of the radical trends of the *Left Poputchiki*, which itself developed from the work of Vladiri Mayakovsky, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Sergei Tretyakov and the *Left Front of the Arts* (LEF), ‘stem directly from the last Western bourgeois slogans of the prewar period – from Futurism, Constructivism, Unanimism, and so on’.<sup>89</sup> The revolutionary potential of the Surrealist experience of profane illumination stems from its metaphysical realism, a ‘belief in the real, separate existence of concepts whether outside or inside things’ transposed from the ‘logical realm of ideas’ to the magical realm of words’.<sup>90</sup> But this potential is blocked by the Surrealist emphasis on the subjective and individual world of the dream, which neglected any consideration of the collective forms and organisation of experience.<sup>91</sup> Benjamin’s formulation of the importance of the expressionist poet and novelist Paul Scheerbart during this period – whose utopian fiction first glimpsed, he says, ‘the revolutionary character of technological achievement’ – prepares the ground for his appreciation of the technological innovations of the Russian Constructivists, whose socialist orientation permitted the overcoming of the bourgeois limitations of the European avant-garde, and the expansion of metaphysical materialism into the collective realm of technology.<sup>92</sup>

---

88 This is exemplified in Charlotte and Otilie’s delight at the portfolio of copies from the camera obscura, which enables them ‘to range through the world thus comfortably in their solitude and to watch coasts and harbours, mountains, lakes and rives, cities, castle and many another spot with a name in history moving before their eyes’ (J. W. von Goethe, *Elective Affinities*, op. cit.p.202).

89 Walter Benjamin, ‘The Political Groupings of Russian Writers’, *SW2* p.8.

90 Walter Benjamin, ‘Surrealism’, *SW2* p.212.

91 Walter Benjamin, ‘Surrealism’, *SW2* p.217.

92 The ‘orientalism, gothicism, his interest in theosophy and light-mysticism’ which provide the



Benjamin's lover Asja Lacis, for example, drew upon and discussed with him Tretyakov's 'idea of "the art worker" as a "psycho-engineer, a psycho-constructor" working on "a reorganization of the human psyche with the goal of achieving the commune"''.<sup>93</sup> The First Working Group of Constructivists, established in March 1921 by Aleksei Gan, Aleksandr Rodchenko, Varvara Stepanova, Karl Ioganson, Vladimir Stenberg, Georgii Stenberg, and Konstantin Medunetskii, 'set out to "involve its members in the revolutionary inventive work of the Constructivists, who...have decided to realise the communist expression of material structures"', whilst Aleksei Gan's subsequent manifesto on *Constructivism* (1922) opposed bourgeois artistic composition as the representation of reality by insisting on *construction* as an "organisation of life" through the integration and arrangement of material, real elements.<sup>94</sup> This shift in the materials utilised by the artist, the technological transformation of the processes involved, and the collective, everyday intentions for the object lie closer to Plato's *materialistic* craftsman than the *daemonic* prophet. The product is not longer a work of art, but a 'real object...autonomous in its form and content'.<sup>95</sup> In the restructuring of nature according to the Aesthetic Idea, the genius now no longer resembles Kant's artist but the Goethean scientist: not simply the researcher into nature but an experimenter, although one guided not by the instrumental concerns of knowledge, but the desire to give expressive form to these pure contents.

Benjamin's appreciation of Goethe's tender empiricism shifts during this period, and his recognition of its applicability for the cultural analysis of technological forms signals a softening of his earlier criticism of its categorial deviation from art into science. Following his claims about Blossfeldt's photographic images in 'News about Flowers' in 1928, his 'Short History of Photography' the following year explicitly presents August Sanders' collection of social photography in *The Face of Our Time* [*Das Antlitz der Zeit*] as a tender empiricism, which Benjamin calls a 'comparative photography' and which

---

backdrop to Scheerbart's own utopianism is schooled in the primal elements of Goetheanism (Reyner Banham, 'The Glass Paradise', *The Anti-Rationalist and the Rationalists*, eds. Nikolaus Pevsner, J. M. Richards, Dennis Sharp, (Oxford, Architectural Press, 2000), p.189); Walter Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin: Moscow Diary*, ed. Gary Smith, (Cambridge, MA & London, Harvard University Press, 1986), p.82.

93 Evgenii Bershtein, 'The Withering of Private Life: Walter Benjamin in Moscow', *Everyday Life in Early Soviet Russia: Taking the Revolution Inside*, eds. Christine Kiaer & Eric Naiman, (Bloomington & Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 2006), p.223. Benjamin describes Lacis herself as an "engineer [*Ingenieur*]" who had cut through his own psyche in his dedication to her in *One-Way Street* (written 1923-6, published 1928).

94 Christine Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, (New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 1983), p.3.

95 Nikolai Tarabukin, *Ot mol'berta k mashine* [From the Easel to the Machine], (Moscow, 1923), p.8; trans. Christine Lodder, op. cit., pp.73-4.

recalls Goethe's own comparative anatomy.<sup>96</sup> Crucial to this insight is the recognition that the 'social fact of art-as-photography' in the technological reproduction of works corresponds to a transformation of aesthetics towards an understanding of production as collective creation and reception. In terms reminiscent of Goethe's own description of tender empiricism, Alexander Rodchenko says of his constructivist practice of photomontage:

In order to teach man to look in new ways it is necessary to photograph ordinary, familiar objects from totally unexpected viewpoints and in unexpected positions, and to photograph new objects from various vantage points so as to give a complete impression of the object. We are taught to look in a routine, inculcated manner. We must discover the visible world. We must revolutionize our visual thinking. We must remove the cataract from our eyes.<sup>97</sup>

Christine Lodder describes the resulting work as one which exploits 'the objective descriptive content of the photograph to give reality to impossible but allegorical images, conveying coherent ideas'.<sup>98</sup> Benjamin himself draws on this 'new optics' for his description of historical life in socialist Russia in the 1927 essay on 'Moscow'. It will be captured by a presentational form, he says, in which is 'devoid of all theory...a description of Moscow at the present moment in which "all factuality is already theory" and which would therefore refrain from any deductive abstraction, from any prognostication, and even with certain limits, from any judgement...'.<sup>99</sup> What Benjamin perceives in the cultural and technological concretions of Russian life are not empirical facts, he insists, but the concrete convergence of the real and the true: *Urphänomen*.

---

96 'So it was quite in order for an observer like Döblin to have hit on precisely the scientific aspects of this work, commenting: "Just as there is comparative anatomy...so this photographer is doing comparative photography..." (Walter Benjamin, 'Little History of Photography', *SW2* p.520).

97 Alexander Rodchenko, 'Puti sovremennoi fotograffi', *Novyi lef*, 9, (1928), pp.38-9; trans. Christine Lodder, op. cit., 202.

98 Christine Lodder, op. cit., 199.

99 Walter Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin: Moscow Diary*, ed. Gary Smith, (Cambridge, MA & London, Harvard University Press, 1986), p.132.

### 3. On Human Life and Life as Such: Refractive Dialectics and Historical Judgement

*Tell no-one but the wise,  
For the masses will only mock:  
I praise the living thing  
That yearns for flaming death.*

–J. W. von Goethe, ‘Blessed Yearning’, in *West-Eastern Divan*

*But besides the concept of synthesis, another concept, that of a certain non-synthesis of two concepts in another, will become very important systematically, since another relation between thesis and antithesis is possible beside synthesis.*

–Walter Benjamin, ‘On the Program of the Coming Philosophy’

#### 3.1 Kant’s Historical Sign: Idealism and Realism in Historical Experience

In the previous chapter, the speculative concept of experience operating in Goethe’s scientific writings was considered in relation to Benjamin’s development of a materialist theory of ideas and its implications for his understanding of genius in relation to art and to technology. However, the appearance of truth which Benjamin associates with the semblance characteristic of beauty can be defined not only in terms of its relationship to “natural” phenomenon but also to “historical” ones.<sup>1</sup> Goethe’s thought therefore proves fruitful for Benjamin not only in the context of an experiential relationship mediating between a subject and a present object, but also in considering the aporetic appearance of the past object for the present historian. Here, the medium of observation examined in the last chapter is understood in terms of a ‘now of legibility [*das Jetzt der Erkennbarkeit*]’, which Benjamin later defines as the “historical index” pertaining to the dialectical image (*AP* N3, 1). Benjamin claims this dialectical view of history begins with Goethe, and understands his own concept of the original phenomenon [*Ursprungsphänomen*] as a transposition of the truth of the primal phenomenon [*Urphänomen*] ‘from the pagan context of nature...into the Jewish context of history’.<sup>2</sup>

The project of utilising a speculative concept of experience to legitimate what Benjamin calls a Judaic conception of history is apparent from the early essay on ‘The Life of Students’, in which Benjamin speaks of the ‘exclusive task of criticism’ as an ‘act of cognition’ which makes legible an ‘image of the highest metaphysical state of history...deeply rooted in every present’ (*LS* 37). He calls the attendant view of history one whose metaphysical structure ‘appears to be concentrated in a single focal point’ like ‘the messianic domain or the idea of the French Revolution’ (*LS* 37). The latter reference

---

1 *GEA* pp.350-1 & *OGT* pp.30-1; Walter Benjamin, ‘On Some Motifs in Baudelaire’ [hereafter *OSMB*], *SW4* p.352, n.63.

2 Walter Benjamin, ‘Eduard Fuchs, Collector and Historian’ [hereafter *EF*], *SW3* p.262; *AP* N2a, 4.

recalls Kant's description of the French Revolution as a 'historical sign', a philosophy of history informed by an Enlightenment understanding of progress which is the ostensible target of Benjamin's writing here and elsewhere. It is therefore important to understand Benjamin's introduction of this messianic image as an alternative to Kant's historical sign and undialectical philosophy of history.

Just as the organisation of living nature necessitates a diversion into reflective judgement for Kant, which seeks to intervene between theoretical understanding and practical teleology, so the contingency of collective human action poses a problem for historical experience. The discipline of history, Kant argues, attempts to find regularity and lawfulness in human affairs, yet discovers only the senselessness of a farcical comedy.<sup>3</sup> The philosophical historian must, however, 'attempt to find a purpose in nature behind this senseless course of human events', and in line with the Copernican revolution of his critical philosophy he therefore proposes the supposition of a transcendental standpoint for history.<sup>4</sup> In 'The Conflict of the Faculties', he nonetheless seeks in the phenomenon of history a 'historical sign [*Geschichtszeichen*]' which would demonstrate 'the tendency of the human race viewed in its entirety...which points to the existence of such a cause and to its effectiveness...undetermined with regard to time, and which would allow progress toward the better to be concluded as an inevitable consequence'.<sup>5</sup>

Kant argues that the French Revolution may be taken as such a sign. As with the experience of the beautiful in nature, such a historical experience is universal and disinterested – indicating an innate, moral character – whilst its compression of the progressive character of time and space into an momentary instant renders it a mere signifier of a more sublime and transcendental Idea of a cosmopolitan totality. The dualistic separation of the transcendental idea and the historical phenomenon results in Kant's critical metaphysics of history permitting an experience of the historical sign only as the undialectical symbol of those 'progressive tendencies' ridiculed by Benjamin in 'The Life of Students' (*LS* 37). Kant's idealism may therefore be taken as one of the principle targets when Benjamin opposes that 'view of history that puts its faith in the infinite extent of time and thus concerns itself only with the speed, or lack of it, with which people and epochs advance along the path of progress' (*LS* 37).

Although Benjamin denounces the bad infinity of Kant's rational Idea, he is also clear that the historian cannot capture the content of the genuine historical object through

---

3 Immanuel Kant, 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose', *Kant: Political Writings*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, ed. Hans Reiss, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991), p.41; cf. also Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, trans. Mary J. Gregor, (Lincoln & London, University of Nebraska Press, 1992), p.151.

4 Immanuel Kant, 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose', op. cit., p.42; Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, op. cit., p.151.

5 Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, op. cit., p.153.

‘the pragmatic descriptions of details (the history of institutions, customs, and so on); in fact, it eludes them’ (*LS* 37). The obverse face of Kant’s transcendental idealism is an empirical realism which takes the historical phenomenon as something that is historically constituted and completed in time. Whilst the collective practice of the participants will be judged by Kant as a “success” or “failure”, it is only the enthusiastic sympathy aroused in the detached spectators which indicates a higher, progressive, and incomplete ideal.

The denunciation of a similar empirical realism occurs in Benjamin’s ‘Epistemo-Critical Prologue’ when he objects to the historicist preoccupation with ‘genesis [*Entstehung*],’ as ‘the process by which the existent came into being’, a position which identifies the historical object with the ‘naked and manifest existence of the factual’ (*OGT* 45). Such an inadequate concept of the historical object is seen operating, for example, in the “inductive approach” of Konrad Burdach’s positivist history of art. The obsession with historical actuality in Burdach’s ‘nominalism....and his resistance to the slightest loss of contact with the factual, are to be attributed to the fear of departing from what is correct’ (*OGT* 43). The idealism behind Kant’s semiotics of the historical sign therefore reinforces a complete separation of phenomenon and idea, which posits the former according to a historicist devotion to a scientifically conceived actuality and the latter as an infinite and regulative principle of religious totality.

Benjamin’s criticism of such a view derives from his attention to the necessary appearance of truth and from an ontology of expression which is capable of conceiving of such semblance. The consequence of Burdach’s historicist concern with actuality in the context of the history of art is the abandoning of any conception of the essential except with regard to every individual, particular object. To talk of artistic genres or historical epochs as essential structures is therefore taken as a hypostatization of a merely general concept, based upon exemplary works as perfect and complete prototypes for future judgement. Such ‘scientific verism’ assumes the historical object to be that which is given and already completed in the “facts” of history, and neglects any consideration of how the truth of the historical object is able to appear to the judgement of later generations (*OGT* 41). This conforms to a ‘bourgeois conception of language’ denigrated in ‘On Language as Such and the Language of Man’, and it is against this view that Benjamin develops an alternative and quasi-theological account of naming as a judgement which aims at the completion and fulfilment of the incomplete object (*LSLM* 65).

At the heart of this conception – and the point at which his views on nature and history intersect – is a theory of expression which posits an alternative understanding of the appearance of truth, based on the critique of an anthropomorphic and instrumental view of both language and history. The former is prevalent in the dominance of Aristotelian semiotics, which begins from the language of humans to claim that ‘the

means of communication is [through] the word, its object factual, and its addressee a human being' (*LSLM* 65). Such a conception props up a positivist empiricism which takes the ultimate object "meant" or "signified" in language to be 'factual subject matter' (*LSLM* 65). Benjamin opposes this with a concept of a non-instrumental and non-intentional theory of language *as such*. In the wider context of history, this non-anthropomorphic conception of linguistic expression also leads to an expansion of the domain of the historical beyond that of the life of humans to include the sphere of the technological and the produced within a history of life ('the living thing') *as such*.

### 3.2 The Weak Messianism of Early German Romanticism

Benjamin's metacritique of the hypocrisy of positivism with regard to its own language of exposition assumes a transcendental position, which deduces the condition of language as a medium of expression between two poles of communication. This corresponds to the concept of "experiment" discussed with reference to both Romantic and Goethean concepts of natural experience in the last chapter and, transposed into the historical domain, insists on a theory of historical observation as a medium in which subject and object interpenetrate.<sup>6</sup> Importantly, Benjamin's contention that at the 'centre of linguistic philosophy' lies a concept of revelation places language in a 'most intimate connection with the philosophy of religion' (*LSLM* 66). For such a claim introduces a notion of theological fulfilment to linguistic expression which expands the temporal dimension of signification from a concern with the historical relation of the apparently completed past to the present, to one with a future completeness only in the totality of history. Lacking this messianic register of historical fulfilment, historicism is reduced to the context of mere actuality, taking each particular historical object as something given and fundamentally completed in the past, and historical time as an empty, infinite and universal medium of human progression towards a constantly deferred and regulative

---

6 There is a paradox inherent to linguistic communication which demands an alternative account of signification must be sought: if signs are primarily understood as the capacity for one thing to represent or stand in for another, this capacity for representation suffers an infinite regress with regard to how signification itself first becomes possible. Benjamin's solution is to regard things as primarily linguistic and therefore always already involved in signification. As a result of this transcendental perspective upon the necessary condition of language *as such*, Benjamin comes to understand signification as primarily expressive of *itself*: communicating the *linguistic being* of things. Drawing on Hamann's theological idea of revelation as the creative Word of God, but assigning a fundamental importance to humans as essentially linguistic creatures, Benjamin introduces his theory of "naming" as a metaphysical – indeed theological – conception of signification. The "original" Word of God in things is understood as the 'germ of the cognizing name' which demands to be expressed in human language, and the task of human expression as a "naming" through which language in its absolute wholeness communicates itself to God (*LSLM* 65). The name is 'the language of language (if the genitive refers to the relationship not of a means but of a medium' (*LSLM* 65): a critical medium which extends between signifier and signified.

Idea.

Much scholarly attention has been given to how the turn to Early German Romanticism in Benjamin's work is directed towards a philosophical reformulation of the concept of historical judgement and the view of historical experience it entails. However, without underestimating the importance of Early German Romanticism – in particular the work of Friedrich Schlegel – for Benjamin's efforts, the discussion that follows focuses on how his criticism of Romanticism positions their thought as conceptually inadequate, and draws upon Goethe's work to supplement and critically develop Romanticism in a way that provide a more valuable, dialectical overcoming of Kant's reduction of language and history to the instrumentality of human speech and action.

When, in 'The Life of Students', the critical act of cognition is charged with the task of 'liberating the future from its deformed existence in the womb of the present', the deformity of its object points to that 'distorted and fragmented torso of the one erotic spirit' which is to be transformed into a 'single community of creative persons' through love (*LS* 44-6). Here the torso is contrasted to a collective and completed spiritual whole, and the juxtaposition of both fragment and torso plays upon the paradoxical status of the particular as both incomplete but nevertheless completed. Benjamin later distinguishes the torso from the fragment by associating the former with the contingency of the work in its relation to the consummate archetype, a relationship expounded through Goethe's aesthetics (*CC* 181). At the same time, Benjamin accuses Goethe of identifying the archetype with a genetically original, perfect and complete prototype, a confusion which, he argues, renounces thought by effectively denying the possibility of *any* positive moment in the judgement of particulars (which are always incomplete and imperfect in relation to the pre-existing ideal) and therefore leaving the problem of absolute form unresolved (*CC* 181). The Ideal, as the invisible archetype of nature, has no share in individual works, which therefore 'never vitally coalesce' into the higher, infinite and singular unity of the Romantic Idea. As a result, the 'supreme conceptual unity' of the Ideal decomposes into 'a limited, harmonic discontinuum' or 'plurality of pure contents', in relation to which – and in contrast to Romanticism – 'the single work remains, as it were, a torso', understood as something essentially imperfect and incomplete and yet nonetheless incapable of further completion and therefore effectively completed despite its contingency (*CC* 189 & 179).

Whilst it ostensibly proceeds from this Goethean concept of the present phenomenon as an imperfect and incomplete torso, criticism as liberation appears in 'The Life of Students' as the possibility for unhindered, organic growth, comparable to the 'profoundly organic individual development' attributed to the true erotic creativity of the spiritual community (*LS* 39). This ideal of organic growth is reinforced by the reference

to the transformative potential of love, a principle taken from the later German Romanticism, for whom – Benjamin comments elsewhere – ‘observation was a sun beneath whose rays the object of love opens up to further growth’.<sup>7</sup> This capacity for *re*-formation suggests the autonomy and unity of living form, a notion which will be returned to in the discussion of the Romantic “symbol” and which Benjamin claims has its roots in the Early German Romantic concept of reflection. It is in this sense that Benjamin defines the ‘essence of Romanticism’ – explored in relation to the question of absolute form in art – as a ‘messianism’, exemplified in Friedrich Schlegel’s claim that the ‘inception of modern history’ is found in the ‘revolutionary desire to realize the kingdom of God on earth’.<sup>8</sup> In ‘The Concept of Criticism’ and the ‘Epistemo-Critical Prologue’, Benjamin therefore opposes the historicism of art history by developing an alternative model of experience drawn in part from the philosophical aesthetics of Early German Romanticism and its messianic focus upon the work as a fragment.<sup>9</sup>

But whilst Benjamin cites the comment that Schlegel’s “new religion” denies ‘an ideal of human fulfilment that would be realized in infinity’ and demands it instead ‘at this very moment...at every point of existence, realized ideal on every level of life’, nonetheless the positivity of Romantic judgement as the medium of messianic intensification problematizes the virtuality associated with this conception of history.<sup>10</sup> For the Romantics seek to overcome the contingency of the singular in the virtual medium of progressive determination towards the Idea. As a consequence, the validity of all intermediary generic or epochal structures are dissolved in the positivity of intensification. The limitations of this view are discussed in the context of the Romantic relationship between the particular work of art and the universal essence of art, which is contained in the thesis of a progressive, universal poetry. Utilising Schlegel’s conception of the essential “idea” of art, Benjamin approvingly notes that in an ‘effort to secure the concept of the idea of art from those who would see it as an abstraction from empirical artworks,’ Schlegel seeks to identify this concept with the Platonic Idea as a ground. But Schlegel ‘committed the old error of confounding “abstract” and “universal” when he believed he had to make that ground into an individual’ (CC 167). Calling this the

---

7 Walter Benjamin, ‘The Philosophy of History of the Late Romantics and the Historical School’, *SWI* p.284.

8 Friedrich Schlegel, *Athenaeum Fragments*, #222, quoted in CC p.185, n.3.

9 Benjamin’s “Romanticism” has been considered in some depth by a number of recent thinkers. Cf., for example, the essays in Andrew Benjamin and Beatrice Hanssen (eds.), *Walter Benjamin and Romanticism*, Michael Löwy’s reading of Benjamin in *Fire Alarm*, (London & New York, Verso, 2006), and Marcus Paul Bullock, *Romanticism and Marxism: the philosophical development of literary theory and literary history in Walter Benjamin and Friedrich Schlegel*, (New York, Peter Lang, 1987).

10 Charlotte Pingoud, *Grundlinien der ästhetischen Doktrin Fr. Schlegels*, (Stuttgart, 1914), pp.52ff., quoted in CC p.185, n.3.



‘*mystical* thesis that art itself is one work,’ Benjamin notes how Schlegel ‘strains his concepts and grasps at a paradox’ when this progressive formalism leads him to effectively deny any intermediary structure between the particular fragment and the individual, unified Idea (CC 166).

Whilst Benjamin protects the correlating Romantic notion of progressive, universal poetry from any ‘modernizing misunderstanding’, he does so only by re-invoking Schlegel’s fundamental error mentioned above (CC 168). Since ‘Schlegel strove for the determinacy, the individuality of the idea,’ the endlessness of this progression should not be interpreted as indicating ‘a mere function of the indeterminate infinite of the task’ within the ‘empty infinite of time’. The task is a determinate one, Benjamin reminds us: ‘the ever more exact and thorough regulating and ordering of that medium [of forms]...the *continually* more comprehensive unfolding and enhancement of poetic forms’ [emphasis added]. With this, Benjamin joins together his criticism of Romanticism with the first section of his essay, concerned with Fichtean reflection. For Schlegel’s mystical thesis of individuality ‘stands in exact correlation with the principle which asserts the indestructibility of works that are purified in irony’ (CC 167). That is, the principle of the indestructibility of works – their progressively higher, reflective unfolding and determining of lawfulness in the continuous medium of forms – is equally mystical. For this reason, the notion of natural growth Benjamin introduces in relation to the liberation of the torso in ‘The Life of Students’ must be radically transformed from any conflation with the merely organic unfolding and indestructibility life of the parts and organs in relation to the individual whole.

This leaves the Romantic Absolute, with its emphasis on self-knowledge through reflection, as the parody of Socratic dialectics: a medium of progressive ascent through the pure forms of knowledge towards the ultimate Idea. Although Romantic criticism ‘in its central intention is not judgement but...the completion, consummation, and systematization of the work’, this completion coincides with its ‘resolution in the absolute’ (CC 159). Such a vision of consummation means that Romanticism eschews any judgement of the work according to prior models, instead performing an immanent criticism which takes as the only standard of the work ‘the reflection...imprinted in its form’ (CC 159). Romantic “judgement” therefore eliminates any moment of negativity, since the only criterion against which the work may be negatively judged concerns its original status as a work or not. This posits the genuine work as a fragment in relation to the absolute whole, necessarily incomplete but involved in an infinite and continual process of completion. Criticism becomes a ‘the medium in which the restriction of the individual work refers methodically to the infinitude of art and finally is transformed into that infinitude [*Unendlichkeit*]’ (CC 152). Novalis compares this to certain “mythical”

translations of works which, Benjamin explains, represent ‘a medial, *continuous* transposition of the work from one language into another’ (CC 154; emphasis added). Lacking any dialectical moment of completion or fulfilment, “Romanticizing” – as the immersion of the ‘central – that is, universal – moment of the work’ in the medium of art – becomes, in Novalis’ words, an ‘Absolutizing, universalizing, classification of the individual moment...’.<sup>11</sup>

The complete positivity in the ‘intensification of the consciousness of the work through criticism’ excludes from theoretical consideration what Benjamin calls the necessary, negative ‘moment of self-annihilation’ (CC 152). For Friedrich Schlegel, the work of art ‘must be a mobile transitory moment in the living transcendental form’ and the act of criticism directed at the overcoming of that contingency (CC 182). Benjamin calls this ‘contingent character of individual works’ their ‘status as a torso’ in relation to the infinitude of the absolute, and remarks that Schlegel’s concept of the Absolute as a medium of the lawfulness of forms is directed against this very torso character (CC 182). Because the Romantics could not acknowledge any conception of prototypes as ‘autonomous works complete in themselves, definitively fashioned entities exempted from eternal progression’, they set about completely dissolving ‘the ancient works, as well as the ancient genres, into one another’ (CC 182-3). As a consequence, they also dissolved the temporality of art into the space of a flattened-out unity and continuity of the medium, which results in the ‘the absolute identity of the ancient and modern – in past, present, or future’ (CC 167). Benjamin’s concern to rescue the contingency of the particular leads him to integrate the concept of the torso associated with a Goethean theory of art into the transformed Early German Romantic concept of criticism.

A similar philosophy of art is apparent in Benedetto Croce’s ‘devotion to the particular’ as it is considered in the ‘Epistemo-Critical Prologue’. Whereas in Burdach’s positivism the essential is reduced to the particular, Croce’s ‘concern that departure from [the particular] might mean the complete loss of the essential’ results in the jettisoning of all aesthetic classification in order to preserve the integrity of the essence, turning it into a single and universal absolute. Since the originality and particularity of each artwork resists further classification according to merely abstracted common features, the result is that ‘the genre or class is, in this case, a single one: art itself...’.<sup>12</sup> Croce’s “romantic” concern with the individual work ends up with a total immersion in the chaotic flux of particulars, which are doomed to remain merely unconceptualised ‘objects of vague wonder’ without the possibility of transformation and therefore without history (OGT 45).

---

11 Novalis, *Schriften*, (Berlin, 1901), Volume 2, pp.499 & 304, quoted in CC pp.152-3.

12 Benedetto Croce, *The Essence of the Aesthetic*, trans. Douglas Ainslie, (London, 1951), p.53; quoted in OGT p.43.

This incompleteness of the historical object as a fragment in relation to the singular Idea removes any reference to the actuality of history from process of completion. ‘From the point of view of the philosophy of art’, Benjamin says, ‘...the historical process is *merely* virtual’ (*OGT* 38; emphasis added). In contrast to the absolute negativity of historicism, the positivity of Romantic criticism culminates in a virtuality divorced from actual history and the messianic structure of Early German Romanticism dissolves into a transcendentalism which makes only tenuous and momentary contact with the empirical.

### 3.3 The Principle of Refraction: Chromatic-Linguistic Models of Experience

In ‘The Concept of Criticism’, Benjamin seeks to rescue the messianic structure of Romanticism by supplementing the positivity of Romantic criticism with a negative, destructive moment drawn from a number of sources, including a radicalized version of their own concept of irony, Friderich Hölderlin’s principle of artistic sobriety, and Goethe’s contrasting thesis of the essentially uncritizable status of the particular work. What is gestured towards in each of these is a principle of destructibility, the negative movement of annihilation which proceeds not from lawful necessity but the contingency of the particular. In this essay, the critique of Romanticism attempts to develop the dialectical relation between completion and incompleteness not by drawing on Goethe directly but, for example, on Friedrich Schlegel’s early work, where his Romantic understanding of criticism nonetheless ‘still stood close to Goethe’s conception’ (*CC* 181). Schlegel gives Goethe’s theory of art a ‘pregnant formulation’, Benjamin suggests, ‘in referring to Greek art as that “whose particular history would be the natural history of art in general”’ (*CC* 181). Here, then, it is the Romantic appropriation of Goethe which proves a more useful tendency for Benjamin, who quotes Schlegel’s insight concerning the ‘perfect intuition’ of the one ‘who dedicates himself to the lawfulness of that primal image’ and who gives content to an empty law by imitating ‘a highest aesthetic archetype’.<sup>13</sup>

The shift in Benjamin’s evaluation of Goethe considered in the previous chapter can be detected in the context of the historical object in accordance with the increasing importance attributed to Goethe’s dialectical view of historical judgement and the extent to which Benjamin is therefore able to draw on Goethean thought directly. Part of this change lies in his recognition, by the ‘Epistemo-Critical Prologue’, that the structural opposition established between Croce’s “philosophy” and Burdach’s “history” of art reflects a similar antithesis to that between natural philosophy and natural history in

---

13 Friedrich Schlegel, *Jungendschriften*, Vol 1, pp.123ff; quoted in *CC* 182.

Goethe's own morphological writings.<sup>14</sup> Benjamin's attempt to construct an appropriately transdisciplinary approach to the artistic object – across the historicist actuality of art history and the messianic virtuality of Romantic aesthetics – indicates how his efforts should be understood as the foundation of a “comparative criticism” of historical objects in line with Goethe's own morphological “comparative anatomy” of natural ones. Here, then, it is Goethe's Ideal which provides the model for a more direct overcoming of these antithetical tendencies, whilst the Romantic concept of reflection is dismissed for upholding a conception of truth associated with a progressive infinitude (*OGT* 38).

The principle of dialectical refraction central to Benjamin's understanding of Goethe's thought does not emerge for the first time in the essay on Romanticism, however, but can be detected operating even in Benjamin's earliest writings. The concept of the torso which is given a decisive articulation in ‘The Concept of Criticism’, and which will be regarded as establishing the allegorical backdrop which runs through the *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, derives from the development of this principle of refraction within Benjamin's models of chromatic and linguistic models of experience. Even prior to these works, however, the gradual foregrounding of this principle anticipates the growing centrality of Goethe's thought for Benjamin's philosophy. If the essay on Goethe's *Elective Affinities* fortifies the recognition of the uniquely modern

---

14 The recognition of a disciplinary dispute between the “philosophy” and the “history” of art is attributed by Benjamin to Heinrich Wölfflin, his own tutor at the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich, and to Alois Riegl, around whose influential ideas Otto Pächt and Hans Sedlmayr had, in a series of articles published within their journal *Kunstwissenschaftliche Forschungen*, established the New Vienna School of art history. In a later review of Hans Sedlmayr's programmatic article, ‘Towards a Rigorous Study of Art’ (1931), Benjamin notes how it delimits two ways of approaching the work of art. The “historical” approach ‘could compare and classify these products on the basis of their properties, it could infer genetic connections (connections to a common ancestor or original source) from similar properties, and it could observe the transformations in works of art from one historical time to another’ (Hans Sedlmayr, ‘Towards a Rigorous Study of Art’, *The Vienna School Reader: Politics and Art Historical Method in the 1930s*, ed. Christopher S. Wood, (New York, Zone Books, 2000), p.135). Sedlmayr's description of a one-sided art history treats the work as a generalised historical object, and traces the historical lineage of its generalizable features. In contrast, the “aesthetic” approach studies ‘internal organisation and structure; it can accurately classify works according to their natural groups and establish genetic connections among works on the basis of their properties; it can arrive at an understanding of the historical events whose products it is studying and of the force at work behind those events’ (ibid., p.139). Here, the critic prioritises the object as a work of art with specific aesthetic features, and is able to engage in classification according to those qualities. It is able to “date” the work in a “topological” rather than “chronological” sense, Sedlmayr says, by ‘determining its position (earlier or later) in a genetic series, and it can locate and attribute – again, not by assigning empirical historical individuals (as creators) to particular things but by establishing natural groups and “aesthetic personages” in Benedetto Croce's sense’ (ibid., p.13). Benjamin attempts to establish and overcome this opposition in the ‘Epistemo-Critical Prologue’ and, shortly after the publication of the *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, writes that the precondition for any ‘effective physiognomic definition’ of the uniqueness of the particular work is the decomposition of ‘the rigid partitions between the disciplines that typified the concept of the sciences in the nineteenth century’ (Walter Benjamin, ‘Curriculum Vitae (III)’, *SW* 2 p.78).

insights achieved within Goethe's mature work, the preparation for Benjamin's re-evaluation of the allegorical itself may be said to derive from the developing metaphysics of colour and language in his early thought. To the extent that these can be shown to possess an implicitly Goethean emphasis upon a productively refractive synthesis, the fundamental Goetheanism of Benjamin's philosophy therefore becomes apparent.

In *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience*, Howard Caygill convincingly demonstrates the extent to which Benjamin's early writings are concerned not only with the more familiar themes of time and language but also with a metaphysics of colour. This perception of 'colour content' is associated in Benjamin's early work with 'the interrelated totality of the world of the imagination' and later with an obliquely immanent totality. The fascination that colour holds for children in the shifting nuances of the soap bubble or the intensities of artistic images involves a pure vision of 'something spiritual', detached from all reflection or intellectual concern with formal lawfulness.<sup>15</sup> Caygill explores such a notion in relation to the 'chromatic infinity' intimated by Benjamin in the "phantasy" colours of Matthias Grünewald's Isenheim Altarpiece at Colmar.<sup>16</sup> Grünewald 'painted the halo of the angel on his altar in the colours of the rainbow,' Benjamin writes, 'so that the soul as phantasy can stream through its holy shapes'.<sup>17</sup> His use of colour is comparable to that of the child's spiritual experience, such that the infinity Kant restricted to the faculty of reason intrudes into an intuition of pure content distinct from Kant's spatio-temporal intuition.<sup>18</sup>

It is significant that in his description of Grünewald's work from the following year, Benjamin adds that this spiritual effect associated with the chromatic infinity of colours is achieved through the dialectical interaction between light (or radiance) and darkness (or the nocturnal). Now, the saints' halos are said to emerge with such grandeur from the 'greenest black' because the 'radiant is true only where it is refracted in the nocturnal...'.<sup>19</sup> This dialectical conception of refraction as necessary for the appearance of

---

15 Walter Benjamin, 'A Child's View of Colour', *SWI* pp.50-1. 'With these words, notes Benjamin, Goethe's supplement to the colour theory reveals what is the essence of children's games, games of pure contemplation in fantasy: soap bubbles, the damp colours of magic lanterns, indian ink and decal' (Esther Leslie, *Hollywood Flatlands*, op. cit., pp.268-9; cf. Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, (Frankfurt, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972-1989), 4, 2, p.614). Goethe speaks of how the 'child looks at the soap bubble as a colourful toy, and the older child is fascinated by the brilliant colours which appear when he looks at a piece of cut glass' (J. W. von Goethe, 'Contribution to Optics' (1791), *Goethe's Theory of Colour*, ed. Maria Schindler, (Sussex, England, New Knowledge Books, 1964), ¶8).

16 Walter Benjamin, 'A Child's View of Colour', *SWI* pp.50-1; Howard Caygill, *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience*, op. cit., p.12.

17 Walter Benjamin, 'The Rainbow: Dialogue on Phantasy', *Gesammelte Schriften*, op. cit., 7, 1, p.25, quoted in Howard Caygill, *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience*, op. cit., p.12.

18 Howard Caygill, *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience*, op. cit., pp.83-4.

19 Walter Benjamin, 'Socrates', *SWI* p.52.

true radiance is closer to Goethe's than Newton's scientific theory of colour.<sup>20</sup> Newton's attempt to regulate nature through experimentation imprisons the phenomenon of colour in the 'gloomy-empirical-mechanical-dogmatic torture chamber' of the dark room, and in doing so fails to capture its essential nature (MR #430). His experiment in optics refracted light through a small hole into a darkened room, producing the effect of a colour spectrum on the opposing wall which can be replicated using a refractive prism.<sup>21</sup> 'Newton felt himself obliged to conclude, from those phenomena of colour which occur *under certain conditions of refraction*,' Goethe writes, 'that colourless light must be the result of a meeting of many coloured lights; he believed to be able to prove it'.<sup>22</sup>

In contrast to Newton's method, Goethe insists that 'direct experience alone should lie at the foundation of all natural science' and that 'a theory has value only when it includes *all* experiences'.<sup>23</sup> The patient and attentive observer should not 'seek for something behind the phenomena', however, because 'everything in the realm of fact is already theory', so that the 'blue of the sky' already reveals 'the basic law of chromatics' (MR #430). Spurred on by an artistic experience of colour that differed greatly from Newton's description, what he found in his own further experimentation is that not only do the colours disappear when the aperture is widened, implying to him a necessary concentration of the light within its darkened border, but that a different spectrum of colours is produced when the border between light and darkness is inverted. If we invert Newton's prism experiment, Goethe writes, and 'look at the black band on the white paper...we see that darkness as well as light has been transformed into colour', but if we

---

20 'For over ten years colour – understood as an aspect of fantasy – played on [Benjamin's] mind': 'He intended to write a book on colour and children's literature...In 1927 he planned to write a documentary work on "phantasy", the outline of which he showed to a children's book collector in Moscow. As part of these interests he compiled a bibliography on the theme of colour. The bibliography included a book by the editor of Goethe's scientific archive, Rudolf Steiner, on Goethe's colour theory, and Portal's *Couleurs symboliques*...Benjamin read Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* around 1919...His notes on the article by Müller-Freienfels prompted him to recall a poem from Goethe's *West-österlichen Divan* on God [Then he made the pink of dawn, it poured pity on the pain, So inventing for the dark, Of hues and harmonies a game, And everything that fell apart, Now could fall in love again.]...And he notes of it that the unifying element, the dawn, transition between light and dark, is a harmonic resounding play of colours and is just like the colour of fantasy. He adds that the same power of reconciliation appears in the rainbow, the symbol of peace...The "colours of fantasy" had been a theme for a while, since the first traces of Goethe's colour romanticism emerged in his early writings such as "Reflection in Art and Colour" (1914-15), where colour is presented as the highest concentration of seeing, or "The Rainbow" (1915-16)' (Esther Leslie, *Hollywood Flatlands*, op. cit., pp.263-4)

21 The resulting 'round, white figure, transformed and elongated by the prism according to [the colour sequence Red, Yellow, Green, Blue, Violet] calls to mind Newton's SPECTRUM SOLIS; and for a moment we believe we are witnessing the effects of a ray of light split up through a hole in the shutter...' (J. W. von Goethe, 'Contribution to Optics', op. cit., ¶67)

22 Ibid., ¶38.

23 J. W. von Goethe, 'Research Into the Elements of a Theory of Colours', *Goethe's Theory of Colour*, op. cit., ¶14.

draw the same hasty supposition as Newton that ‘we have also a ray of darkness which, like light, we have to split up into five or seven colours, we can easily see that we are on the way to great confusion’.<sup>24</sup> In contrast to Newton’s theory that white light is a composite of colours, which appear in the splitting apart of this unity and can be recombined once again to reproduce the effect of white light, Goethe offers a dialectical theory of colour which arises as the product of an interactive tension *between* light and darkness: the ‘black as well as the white object appears entirely coloured *through the coloured radiation of the border*, and that we need not to look anywhere else for the cause of this phenomenon’.<sup>25</sup>

Goethe’s initial experimentation therefore lead him to believe that Newton’s theory had disregarded the important and productive role of the prism itself as a turbid medium, and that it is not simply refraction that is required to produce colour, but the dialectical interaction and overlapping of the polarities of light and darkness which refraction produces. The primal experience of the blue of the sky can be said to express the truth of chromatics because ‘the darkness of space creates this effect through the veiling’ light of the sun. It is the Earth’s atmosphere as ‘a vehicle for moisture’ which must be ‘considered a turbid medium’ in this instance, which refracts light through the darkness to produce our experience of the blue-coloured sky.<sup>26</sup> Goethe makes it clear that he considers this medium to be matter itself: ‘In chromatics I oppose light and darkness to one another’, he announces, adding that ‘these would never have any connection if matter did not intervene’, because ‘whether matter is opaque, transparent, or even alive, the quality of light and dark will manifest in it, and colour in all its nuances will be created forthwith’.<sup>27</sup> Colour is not the splitting of the composite unity of white light, as Newton supposed, but a new entity which is produced in the refractive interaction of light and darkness in a material medium.<sup>28</sup> Colour is therefore effected through a specific type of synthesis between the metaphysical polarities of light and darkness, as a kind of overlaying of the two which produces something else.

Whilst Benjamin’s own account of spiritual colour partially draws upon this

---

24 Ibid., ¶¶56 & 67.

25 Ibid., ¶66.

26 J. W. von Goethe, ‘Colours in the Sky’, *CW12* p.151. Similarly, a ‘turbid glass held before a dark background and illuminated from the front will appear bluish. The less turbid the glass, the bluer it will look; the least turbid glass will seem violet’. This is also why mountains in the middle distance seem darker blue than those in the far distance. ‘Conversely, the same glass held before something bright will look yellow. The denser the glass, the redder it will seem, so that in the end even the sun will appear ruby red’.

27 J. W. von Goethe, ‘Except from “Toward a Theory of Weather”, *CW12* p.148.

28 The pure or absolute colours are the blue and yellow which result from the primal interaction of light and darkness in the medium of matter. Pure blue and yellow produce green when they overlap, or can be deepened into orange and violet when passed through a more dense medium, which result in the compound colour of purple-magenta.

insight, it is in the realm of language – that other model of speculative experience which is paradigmatic for Benjamin – that this account of refraction takes on a renewed importance. For it is in accordance with such a principle of refractive synthesis that Benjamin's discussion of translation becomes explicable. Caygill argues that the speculative 'exploration of the relationship between identity and infinity (the immanent totality)' in his metaphysics of colour is, in 'On Language as Such', transposed into the philosophy of language, and Goethe himself describes colour as part of the spiritual 'language of nature', in which the divinity of nature is revealed.<sup>29</sup>

The concept of erotic creativity which Benjamin develops in his early work seems in part to be inspired by a concept of the "totality of will" drawn from Goethe's characterisation of Hamann as encapsulating a holistic theory of expression.<sup>30</sup> Truly creative linguistic expression would imitate the divine in its capacity to unify body and soul, the senses and thought, the individual and the collective. But Goethe's consideration of Hamann's 'splendid maxim' on the spiritual unity of expression, evoked in Benjamin's appeal to a "totality of the will", includes a critical proviso which is important for this consideration of spiritual experience. In 'anything transmitted verbally, except for poetry,' Goethe writes, '...words have to be detached or isolated in order to say or mean anything'.<sup>31</sup> As a result, Goethe argues, '[w]hen a person speaks, for that moment he must be one-sided...There can be no informing, no teaching, without separation'. Hamann's attempt to resist this division and to 'speak with the same unity that characterised his feelings, imagination, and thought', results in the 'darkness and gloom' which contributes to the obscurity of what Goethe characterises as his sibylline style'.<sup>32</sup> Radiant expression only emerges from this darkness, therefore, because this separation is permitted and endorsed. The obscurity of Hamann's prose reveals a necessary moment within expression, the truth of divine revelation as it is manifested within finite experience. The lineage of the figure of the torso which passes down through Hamann's writings – he refers to nature as Horace's '*disjecti membra poetae* [limbs of the dismembered poet]' – therefore takes on a new cadence in Goethe's later work.<sup>33</sup>

In 'The Metaphysics of Youth', the 'greatness' of spiritual expression is restricted to the 'true spirit' of the *Genius* in prayer and distanced from the communication of the artistic genius [German: *Genie*].<sup>34</sup> The former 'creates the silence of a new language',

---

29 Howard Caygill, *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience*, op. cit., p.22; J. W. von Goethe, 'Theory of Colour', *CW12* p.159.

30 J. W. von Goethe, 'From My Life: Poetry and Truth', *CW4* pp.380-1; cf. Chapter 1, Section 1.5, above.

31 J. W. von Goethe, 'From My Life: Poetry and Truth', *CW4* pp.380-1, trans. altered.

32 Ibid.

33 cf. J. G. Hamann's epilogue to 'Aesthetica in Nuce: A Rhapsody in Kabbalistic Prose'.

34 Walter Benjamin, 'The Metaphysics of Youth', *SWI* p.7.



Benjamin insists, associating this in the essay on Socrates with both the Platonic dialogue and with the spiritual colours of Grünewald's altarpiece.<sup>35</sup> The refractive element of such creativity – an expression which emerges through the silence of prayer – takes on an erotic dimension in these early essays, being associated with the purity of spiritual production classified as conception without pregnancy (where “pregnancy” is associated with the instrumentality and possessiveness of Socratic knowledge).<sup>36</sup> Just as the true genius is not the ‘expressive, elicit one who vibrates in the light’, but rather the radiance of the ‘the expressionless one who breaks out of the night’, so true procreativity is characterised as the existence of the feminine emerging out of the masculine.<sup>37</sup> In ‘On Language as Such and on the Language of Man’, this ‘unique union’ of ‘conception and spontaneity’ which is characteristic of spiritual creativity is identified with the linguistic act of naming, which Benjamin calls ‘the translation of the language of things into that of man’, of the nameless into the name (*LSLM* 6).

The subsequent shift in Benjamin's theory from a Hamannian conception of original unity to what might be called a more Goethean linguistics of translation is evident in ‘The Task of the Translator’ (1924). Here, Benjamin now cites not Hamann but Goethe's notes from the *West-Eastern Divan*, which, along with Rudolf Pannwitz's *The Crisis of European Culture*, are declared to be ‘the best comment on the theory of translation’.<sup>38</sup> ‘The Task of the Translator’ extends the notion, deployed in the earlier essay on language, that a linguistic realm extends between the poles of the original language and the language of the translator which is not one of ‘abstract areas of identity and similarity’ but ‘media of varying densities’. Linguistic refraction occurs as the element passes through these media – comparable to the refraction of light as it passes through different liquids or through heated air – and because of this translation becomes a ‘continuum of transformations’. In optics, this results in the illusory appearances associated with mirages, and the inverted and frequently condensed or expanded images termed “fata morgana”. Such an effect is caused when light travels through a dramatic change in the atmospheric temperature, which effects the density of the atmosphere and therefore the angle of refraction of the light and subsequent image.<sup>39</sup> Benjamin's own

---

35 Ibid., p.7; Walter Benjamin, ‘Socrates’, *SWI* pp.52-3.

36 Ibid., p.53.

37 Ibid. This formulation draws upon a tradition of genius as the existence of the “natural” within the “historical”. Benjamin's formulation is utilised here to demonstrate the model of refraction operating in his early chromatic, linguistic and erotic models. The attempt to expound this according to sexual stereotypes which have been criticised by Christine Battersby in *Gender and Genius* remains problematic (cf. Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics*, (Bloomington, Indiana, Indiana University Press, 1989).

38 Walter Benjamin, ‘The Task of the Translator’ [hereafter *TT*], *SWI* pp.261.

39 “Fata Morgana” is the Italian translation of Morgan le Fay, the shape-shifting half-sister of King Arthur, and refers to the phenomena of “castles in the sky” produced by the upward

interest in such particular phenomenon extends back to his notes on visual semblance from 1919, where ‘the semblance in which nothing appears’ is classified as ‘the more potent one, the authentic one’, and exemplified by the ‘fata morgana or chimera’.<sup>40</sup>

In ‘The Task of the Translator’ the divine Word, which Benjamin calls the germ of the name, is that ‘nucleus of pure language’ which is ‘tied to linguistic elements and their changes’ and ‘seeks to represent, indeed produce, itself in the evolving of languages themselves’ by being symbolized (*TT* 261). Detached from the flux of the various ways of meaning in different languages, it ‘persists in linguistic creations only in its symbolizing capacity’, where ‘it is weighed with a heavy, alien meaning (*TT* 261). Benjamin defines as the task of the translator ‘to realise in his own language that pure language which is exiled among alien tongues’ by turning ‘the symbolizing into the symbolized itself, to regain pure language fully formed from the linguistic flux’ (*TT* 261). Here, the continuous transformation of language – the process of refraction itself – becomes the object of expression, and an image which is able to fix and isolate this movement is sought. In doing so, the pure language ‘imprisoned in a work’ is liberated in the translator’s ‘re-creation of that work’ (*TT* 261). Translation therefore seeks to redeem the pure language of the name, and each translations offers a “completion” which is angled towards the realm in which the meaning of pure language is ultimately fulfilled. The kinship between human languages ‘cannot be defined adequately by an identity of origin’ but only as a transcendental identity between the totalities of their meaning as a whole, which is ‘achievable not by any single language but only by the totality of their intentions supplementing one another’ (*TT* 257).

What the genuine translation achieves is to allow the language of the translator, in the words of Pannwitz cited by Benjamin, to be ‘powerfully affected by the foreign tongue’ (*TT* 262). The intention is not to turn Greek into German, but to permit something new to emerge by turning German into Greek. Benjamin illustrates this act in the essay on translation by drawing upon Goethe’s own theory, expounded in the ‘Notes on Translation’ for the *West-Eastern Divan*. This describes the highest kind of translation as that which makes ‘the translation identical to the original, not so that it replaces the

---

refraction of the light from a distant object over the horizon, which subsequently vanishes when approached. For example, Goethe uses the term in *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* to describe how Wilhelm’s sudden good fortune and hopes for the future ‘built such a fantastic castle in the air, that not even a fata morgana [*daß Fata Morgagna*] could have produced a stranger combination’ (J. W. von Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*, *CW*9 p.121).

40 Walter Benjamin, ‘On Semblance’, *SW*1 p.223. This figure reappears in ‘A Berlin Chronicle’ (1932) and the *Arcades Project*, where it is associated with the infinite appearance of absolute distance: ‘The courtyard was one of the places where the city opened itself to the child; others, admitting him or letting him go, were railway stations. On departure, their openings were a panorama, the frame of a *fata morgana*. No distance was more remote than the place where the rails converged in the mist’ (Walter Benjamin, ‘A Berlin Chronicle’, *SW*2 p.623; cf. also *AP* F3, 2).

other [*anstatt des anderen*], but rather occupies the place of the other [*an der Stelle des anderen*].<sup>41</sup> The difference between *replacing* the other and *occupying the same place* as the other depends upon the substitution of a flat ontology for a medial one. To put one language in the same place or on top of another implies an optical depth, according to which both are visible at the same moment.

For Goethe, ‘the translator who follows his original closely more or less abandons the originality of his nation, and thus a *tertium quid* comes into being for which the masses slowly have to develop a taste’. He describes this ‘third thing’ which is produced between the two languages in the same terms as Benjamin as an ‘interlinearity’. Whilst Goethe’s own language emphasises the strange temporality of translation – an incongruence or unfashionableness which Benjamin will later characterise as “greatness” in his discussion of Goethe’s own works, considered later – it is the optical terminology of Benjamin’s own writing which brings out the chromatic model inherent to this theory of linguistic production. A ‘real translation is transparent’, Benjamin says, ‘it does not cover the original, does not block its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original all the more fully’ (*TT* 260). The optical imagery utilised here suggests that productivity of naming in the medium of language is, as Caygill suggests, at least partially modelled on a metaphysics of chromatic differentiation. Goethe’s description of the translation “occupying the place of the other” is interpreted by Benjamin in terms of a translucency which is neither mere transparency nor absolute opacity, but a productive intensification of languages, in which something new is created. Optical refraction therefore provides a model for a “synthesis” in which the existing polarities do not disappear with the emergence of the new, but which continue to exist in a productive, overlapping tension upon which the created thing always remains dependent. The “identity” of this third thing is an appearance which is instable, contingent and utterly dependent upon the antinomical relationship out of which it emerges. Benjamin does not devalue the semblance character of this appearance, however, but treats it with the upmost seriousness and importance.

Whereas the ‘continuum of transformations’ referred to in ‘On Language as Such’ evokes the Romantic concept of translation as a ‘a medial, continuous transposition of the work from one language into another’, Benjamin insists in ‘The Task of the Translator’ that whilst the genuine translation enacts a transformation of the nameless into the name, this act of completion through petrification subsequently means the translation itself ‘proves to be untranslatable’ or uncriticizable (*CC* 154; *TT* 262). If the immanent “translatability” of a linguistic creation corresponds to the Romantic conception of

---

41 J. W. von Goethe, ‘Note and Queries for a Better Understanding’ (from *West-Easterly Divan*), trans. Jorg Waltje, *Other Voices*, 2, 2, (March, 2002).

criticizability as an essential incompleteness, it nonetheless finds its fulfilment in the redemption of translation, more generally as naming (*TT* 254 & 261). Because translations themselves remains untranslatable, however, the act of translation does not set into play the infinite intensification of Romantic reflection, but provides a multiplicity of partial completions each of which, at the point it touches the original, provides the tangent of its path to infinity (cf. *TT* 261). Refraction is not, therefore, the decomposition of an original, historical unity but a productive tension which liberates *and* produces the transcendental purity of language. Like colour it is the dialectical tension between the original language and the new language which permits the purity to appear as a result of the refractivity of the medium. This appearance corresponds to that ‘limited, harmonic discontinuum of pure contents’ associated with the Goethean Ideal in ‘The Concept of Criticism’, a harmony expressed by colour or music. Here, then, the early account of refraction is developed into a Goethean theory of translation that enables the modification and transformation of the Romantic concept of criticism.

When Benjamin comes to reflect upon the imagination in his notes from 1920-1, he continues to insist that ‘every work of art is grounded in the imagination’, and that the ‘pure conceiving’ which is the basis of each work is a mode of intuition ‘closest to the mind of children’.<sup>42</sup> This is ‘most obvious’ in the ‘pure appearance’ of ‘the world of light’, Benjamin comments. His insight into the necessarily refractive manifestation of spiritual radiance means he now gives a more complex account of the appearance of this pure content of colour. It is illustrated not only by the Paradisiacal colour previously associated with Grünewald’s saints – and here evoked by the paintings of Philipp Otto Runge – but also with the muted greys of Hans von Marées’ work, and most importantly with the allegorical image of ‘sun setting over the abandoned theatre of the world with its deciphered ruins’.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, the creativity of the imagination earlier associated with the child-like phantasy of colour is now said to have ‘nothing to do with forms [*Gestaltung*] or formations’ but “manifestations [*Erscheinung*]” as ‘de-formations [*Entstaltung*] of what has been formed’.<sup>44</sup> The productivity of the imagination takes on the refractive, de-formative aspect previously associated with the “genius” of Grünewald’s use of colour. This free play of the imagination induces, on the one hand, a feeling of delight which follows from the Paradisiacal purity of its birth, and, because its productivity ‘creates no new nature’, it reveals on the other ‘the world caught up in the process of unending dissolution’, one that ‘never leads to death, but immortalizes the

---

42 Walter Benjamin, ‘Imagination’, *SWI* p.281.

43 Ibid., p.282, n.2; *ibid.*, p. 281.

44 Ibid., p.280.

doom it brings about in an unending series of transitions'.<sup>45</sup> Benjamin associates the melancholic production of such a perspective in the notes on imagination with what he calls a 'genius for forgetting', an idea which, it will be argued, takes on a theological dimension in relation to the messianic completion of history.<sup>46</sup>

If this account of the productive imagination corresponds to the necessary structural moment of annihilation omitted in the positivity of Romantic judgement, its roots lies in the refractive model of colour which dates back to 1916. Whilst Caygill emphasises the significance of this paradigm of 'chromatic differentiation' for the development of Benjamin's speculative concept of experience, it is surprising that his account includes no reference to Goethe's own seminal *Theory of Colour*.<sup>47</sup> Although Benjamin's investigations into colour do not reproduce Goethe's theory directly, the importance they attach to refraction – as the veiling or overlapping of one polarity by another – for a speculative metaphysics of colour indicates a familiarity with and proximity to Goethe's thought which comes to inform Benjamin's presentation of Goethean aesthetics in 'The Concept of Criticism'. Although Goethe's early morphological science has much in common with Romanticism when it opposes any conception of nature as static and fixed, it is his later theory of colour that most clearly expresses the productive tension underlying his theory of nature and thus distinguishes it from that of the Romantics.<sup>48</sup> It is, furthermore, a distinction that is predominant in the

---

45 Ibid., pp.281-2.

46 Ibid., p.282.

47 Howard Caygill, *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience*, op. cit., p.xiv.

48 The concept of form [*Gestalt*], for example, as something that is 'made fast, is cut off, and is fixed in its character' is associated with the mechanistic categories of the Kantian understanding by Goethe and rejected for omitting 'the element of mutability' which is, conversely, prevalent in formation [*Bildung*] as that which 'has been brought forth and likewise what is in the process of being brought forth' (J. W. von Goethe, 'On Morphology', *Goethe's Botanical Writings* trans. Bertha Mueller, (Woodbridge, Connecticut, Ox Bow Press, 1989), p.23). The introduction of the "leaf" as a protean organ in *The Metamorphosis of Plants* is 'only an abstract idea or concept, or something which in actuality is held fast but for an instant', and is meant to express an underlying schema or process of transformation (ibid., pp.23-4). Goethe's scientific writing represents the general shift from a static to a dynamic conception of nature which culminates in Darwin's evolutionary theory. Lukács extends Marx's argument that Germany's political backwardness contributed to the theoretical progressiveness of Hegelian dialectic – 'we Germans have lived our future history in thought, in *philosophy*' – to the whole Age of Goethe as 'one of the last progressive periods of bourgeois thinking' (Karl Marx, 'A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*', *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone & Gregor Benton, (London, Penguin Books, 1992), p.249; Georg Lukács, 'Preface', *Goethe and His Age*, op. cit., p.13). Goethe's thought is 'essentially evolutionary' from the outset, Lukács argues, and it is 'no accident that the laws of the contradictory movement of evolution, the main principles of the dialectical method became known in Germany precisely during the period from Lessing to Heine; that Goethe and Hegel raised this method to the highest level attainable within the limits of bourgeois thinking' (ibid.; Georg Lukács, 'Correspondence between Schiller and Goethe', *Goethe and His Age*, op. cit., p.74).

Esther Leslie, however, emphasises the difference between Hegelian and Goethean dialectics, citing how Friedlieb Ferdinand Rung's phytological writings are critical of Goethe's

allegorical vision of nature presented as the legacy of baroque art which informs what Benjamin identifies as the modernity of the “masked penance” in Goethe’s mature output (*GEA* 328).

### 3.4 Goethe’s “Masked Penance”: From Messianic Redemption to Allegorical Eschatology

A consideration of Benjamin’s chromatic-linguistic model of experience demonstrates the importance of Goethe’s concept of refraction even in Benjamin’s very earliest writings, and shows the increasing prominence it takes on within his theory of translation. Benjamin’s more direct appropriation of a Goethean concept of historical judgement follows the recognition that the dialectical counterpart to the messianic fulfilment of history detected in Romanticism is an emphasis on an eschatological conception of petrified destruction or an elongated process of decomposition. This positive reappraisal of Goethe’s thought begins with the essay on Goethe’s *Elective Affinities*, where Benjamin detects a ‘masked penance’ over the mythologizing of nature in the novel, when the ‘beautiful...comes forth to the limit of what can be grasped’ and appears as the ‘caesura, the pure word, the counter-rhythmic rupture’ in which ‘representation itself very soon appears’ as ‘the torso of a symbol’ (*GEA* 328 & 340-1). This tendency is said to have ‘unfolded even more powerfully in his later works’, which can be read as that ‘legacy of medieval and baroque drama’ that offer a ‘more concrete, more authoritative, and more permanent vision’ for the modern overcoming of classicism and its view of history than that which exhausts itself in romanticism.<sup>49</sup>

This theological legacy of the baroque world view understands nature as essentially incomplete on the basis of its expressiveness. This reflects the graphical character of the “book of nature”, suggested by Hamann’s own semiotics of revelation, according to which every ‘phenomenon of nature was a word, - the sign, symbol, and pledge of a new, secret, inexpressible but all the more fervent union, fellowship and communion of divine

---

theory of metamorphosis for its ‘insufficiently dialectical conception’ (Esther Leslie, *Synthetic Worlds: Nature, Art and the Chemical Industry*, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Reaktion Books, 2005), p.49). ‘Goethe does not mention a backward-stepping, declining force. Or if he does recognize it, it is judged irregular, a part of sickness. For Goethe, while the plant is growing regularly and healthily all is progress, for, from the first seed-leaves to the final ripening of the fruit, progressive metamorphosis is at work, pushing the plant forwards. For Runge, in contrast, the forces at work are contradictory. There is a dialectic of progression and regression’. Similarly, whilst ‘Goethe too had recognized polarity in his analysis of colour, a quality that he insisted emerged from the conflictual interaction of light and darkness...his polarity led always towards a progressive enhancement or intensification’ (ibid., pp.69-70). This criticism of the undialectical progressivism of Goethe’s science will be considered in the Epilogue to this discussion.

<sup>49</sup> *GEA* p.340; *OGT* p.176; Walter Benjamin, ‘What is Epic Theatre [Second Version]’, *Understanding Brecht*, ed. Anna Bostock, (London, Verso, 2003), pp.17-18.

energies and ideas'.<sup>50</sup> What is "meant" by language, Benjamin argues, is the spiritual being of things 'insofar as it is capable of being communicated' in language, and therefore ultimately this implies language itself: 'The language of this lamp, for example, communicates not the lamp (for the mental being of the lamp, insofar as it is *communicable*, is by no means the lamp itself) but the language-lamp, the lamp in communication, the lamp in expression' (*LSLM* 63). In accordance with this idea, nature is completed only when '...things receive their names from man', a historical process of naming which Benjamin understands in accordance with a theory of translation considered previously (*LSLM* 65).

When it introduces the idea that 'everything contained in heaven, the air, in water and on the earth has been produced for the sake of man', this baroque teleology is therefore fundamentally different from the instrumentality of Kant's concern with natural purposes, being 'devoted neither to the earthly nor the moral happiness of creatures' but indicating instead that 'nature serves the purpose of expressing its meaning, it is the emblematic representation of its sense, and as an allegorical representation it remains irremediably different from its historical realization' (*OGT* 170). This theological teleology of fulfilment is absent from Kant's system, for as a consequence of diverting the problem of natural purpose into reflective judgement, Kant's discussion of life becomes infected with anthropocentric tropes of intentionality and instrumentality. What is so problematic about the appearance of organisation in nature, for example, is that for Kant it indicates a 'necessity...of such a character [that it seems] as if it had intentionally been so arranged for our use, while yet it also seems to belong to the original nature of things, without any concern as to [how] we might use it' (*CJ Ak.* 363). Nature is therefore reduced to a bare instrumentality in relation to human use, devoid of any capacity for expression.

In 'The Concept of Criticism' dissertation Benjamin rejects the modern conception of an 'empty infinity' of progress, defending Romanticism against this charge by attributing its medial and qualitative temporal infinity to the presence of a weak messianism (*CC* 168). For Benjamin, the distinction between essential being and phenomenal becoming refers to an intensively immanent virtual history. It is this virtuality which remains the touchstone of Benjamin's overcoming of the progressive, linear purposiveness of Kantian (and neo-Kantian) universal history and secures the radical polemic of his engagement with Goethean science. The relationship between the paradisiacal dawn and the melancholic dusk in Benjamin's discussion of colour (the

---

50 J. G. Hamann, 'The Last Will and Testament of the Knight of the Rose-Cross; Concerning the Divine and Human Origin of Language', *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, op. cit., pp.108-9.

liminal transitions in which night and day, darkness and light, overlap in such a way that the most spiritual and radiant colours appear) becomes articulated according to a dialectical semiotics of the semblance of fulfilment. Like the messianic anticipation of fulfilment, this gestures towards historical completion but here the sense of anticipation is registered as mournful act of eschatological yearning. This is formulated in the *Origin of German Tragic Drama* according to a concept of the allegorical gaze expounded in relation to the baroque mourning-play [*Trauerspiel*]. Benjamin interprets the tendency towards the allegorical in Goethe's mature thought as the overcoming of both his neo-classicism and the quasi-romanticism of his youth, which culminates in that original moment of modernity exemplified in the second part of *Faust*. The importance attached to the eschatological movement of the allegorical permits Benjamin to conceptually develop the problematic messianic virtuality of Romanticism by inserting into it a more direct notion of historical fulfilment in Goethe's work.

The semiotic relationship between symbolic and allegorical expression is given its clearest treatment in the *Origin of German Tragic Drama*. There Benjamin argues that the contemporary notion of the symbol handed down from late Romantic aesthetics is a comforting but undialectical one, which specifies the uniqueness of the symbolic as concerning the “‘manifestation’ of an “‘idea’”...[as] a relationship between appearance and essence’ (*OGT* 160). This essential ‘circle of the “symbolic”’ is circumscribed by ‘the radius of the culture – of the thus perfected beautiful individual...within a progression of events which is, it is true, infinite but is nevertheless redemptive, even sacred’ (*OGT* 160). In contrast to this mistaken concept of the symbol, the allegorical is devalued as the merely conventional association between a concept and its image. It is because of such a misunderstanding of their semiotic relationship that Goethe explicitly distances his concept of the primal phenomenon, as the phenomenal appearance of truth, from any notion of the allegorical. ‘There is a great difference,’ he writes in the context of art, ‘whether a poet is looking for the particular that goes with the general, or sees the general in the particular. The former gives rise to allegory where the particular only counts as an example, an illustration of the general; but the latter in fact constitutes the true nature of poetry’ (*OGT* 161; *MR* #279). His description of the “primal leaf” as a special kind of generic name anticipates the discussion of the magnet as an *Urphänomen* in *Maxims and Reflections*, according to which ‘mere naming already serves as an explanation’ and ‘becomes a symbol for all the rest for which we need not seek a name or words’ (*MR* #434). The *Urphänomen* is understood as a natural archetype in which the totality of the whole is condensed into the contingent particular, and tender empiricism is regarded as grasping the implicit potentialities of the living thing according to its ‘inner necessity and



truth', discovering a law which 'will be applicable to all other living organisms'.<sup>51</sup> Benjamin's appropriation of the *Urphänomen* in his later writings depends upon a reconsideration of this identity of the original phenomenon and the symbolic, a re-contextualisation which proceeds via the allegorical insight achieved within Goethe's mature work.

As Benjamin himself makes clear in the footnote appended to the description of the infinity of the aesthetic symbol, this emphasis upon the symbolic results from a false contrast with the allegorical. Such a tradition has its roots (even if it does not appear in such a form) in the Early German Romantic understanding of the medium of reflection, and its moment of redemption corresponds to that 'false, errant totality – the absolute totality' which is condemned in the essay on *Elective Affinities* as the 'Nazarene essence' of its conclusion. This false synthesis clings to the anticipated resurrection of the lovers: 'And thus the lovers lie side by side. Peace hovers about their abode, smiling angelic figures (with whom too they have affinity) look down upon them from the vault above, and what a happy moment it will be when one day they awaken together'.<sup>52</sup> Yet Benjamin's essay on the *Elective Affinities* exposes a contrasting tendency in Goethe's thought, which assumes an increasing importance in Benjamin's understanding of his work. Goethe's concept of the torso, introduced but not expanded upon in 'The Concept of Criticism', thus serves as the intellectual backdrop to *The Origin of German Mourning-Plays*, which is now elaborated according to a revitalized understanding of the allegorical.<sup>53</sup>

The genuine concept of the symbol is not an aesthetic but a theological one, because its concern with the paradoxical unity of the material and transcendental object refers not to the general but to the historically fulfilled. This unity can be understood as pertaining to the theological *ikon*, associated with a radicalised version of Kant's

---

51 J. W. von Goethe, *Italian Journey*, trans. W. H. Auden & Elizabeth Mayer, (London, Penguin, 1970), pp.310-11.

52 J. W. von Goethe, *Elective Affinities*, op. cit., p.300. This reference to the Catholic affectations in the Romanticism of the Nazarene movement, assembled around Johann Friedrich Overbeck in the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and inspired by the style and intention of mediaeval religious painting, charges Goethe with adopting an unconvincing Christian faith in the anticipated resurrection of the lovers at the end of the novel. Similarly, Benjamin criticises the Early German Romantics in 'The Concept of Criticism' for turning to *religion* in order to articulate the 'weak messianism' inherent in their position (CC p.168).

53 The mourning-play [*Trauerspiel*] describes that 'typical catastrophe' which belongs 'to the estate of man as creature', hinted at in Goethe's *The Natural Daughter* (1803), in which Goethe 'resembled a seventeenth-century poet in his attitude to the subject' (OGT p.89). Similarly, whereas 'Schiller sought to base the drama on the spirit of history as understood by German idealism', Goethe's 'inclination was for mediating compromises which were both important and quite justified by the subject matter', and 'in the concluding scenes of *Faust*, he consciously and coolly, and with a force surpassing even Calderón's, did precisely the things towards which Schiller' – in his later approximations towards the form of the mourning-play – 'might have felt himself unwilling pushed, half irresistibly drawn' (OGT pp.122-3).

Aesthetic Idea in the previous chapter. According to Benjamin, the dialectical totality of the symbol is that of the mystical instant, ‘in which the symbol assumes the meaning into its hidden...interior’ and ‘destruction is idealized and the transfigured face of nature is fleetingly revealed in the light of redemption’ (*OGT* 166). In relation to this redemption the phenomenon appears as a fragment. What distinguishes the allegorical is not its relationship to the transcendental but the temporality and materiality of this relation: ‘in allegory the observer is confronted with the *facies hippocratica* [dying face] of history as a petrified, primordial landscape’ (*OGT* 166). In the same way that translation turns the diachronic transformation of signifying language into the object signified, allegory transposes the historical fulfilment of redemptive destruction into the very setting of nature as it appears for art and history. The fulfilment of history is experienced instead according to a dialectical interplay of catastrophe and eternity.

The ‘now of recognizability [*das Jetzt der Erkennbarkeit*],’ which characterises the ‘historical index’ of the dialectical image in the *Arcades Project* dictates they ‘attain to legibility only at a particular time’ (*AP* N3, 1). The mediated expressiveness of this “now” is anticipated in an early fragment from 1920-1, where the truth which ‘belongs in one sense or another to the perfected state of the world’ is also said to reside ‘in the “now of recognizability”’, described as a ‘medium’ or a ‘*nexus* between existing things and also with the perfected state of the world’.<sup>54</sup> Benjamin is clear, however, that things can enter in such a nexus only in a disjointed and broken state as what he there calls ‘symbolic concepts’ or ‘primal phenomenon’. Nonetheless, the truth of the perfected state of the world identified with messianic fulfilment is manifested only as something ‘erratic, disconnected, utterly unknowable’.<sup>55</sup> What he there calls the “logical time” of this medium of historical legibility is therefore articulated according to this refractive dialectic of incompleteness and completion: the aporetic presence of fulfilment which is gestured towards in the shattered symbol.

The truth which emerges from such a dialectic takes on an existential-historical profundity for Benjamin. The *Arcades Project* distinguishes the “essence” of the dialectical image from any phenomenological notion according to a relation between the ‘what-has-been’ and the ‘now of a particular recognizability’ which ‘bears to the highest degree the imprint of the perilous critical moment on which all reading is founded’ (*AP* N3, 1). This dialectical conjunction is one which registers the immanent possibility of its own disappearance, forgetting, death. Such a conception becomes emphatic, Benjamin argues, in Goethe’s later literary works, leading to an existential emphasis in his concept of experience that is recognised in Benjamin’s essay ‘On Some Motifs in Baudelaire’

---

54 Walter Benjamin, ‘Theory of Knowledge’, *SWI* p.277.

55 Walter Benjamin, ‘Theory of Knowledge’, *SWI* p.277.

(1940). Here Benjamin contrasts the “intuitionism” of Henri Bergson’s attempt to ‘grasp “true” experience’ in the *durée* with what he calls ‘Valéry’s better, Goethean understanding’ (*OSMB* 353 n.63). For Bergson, an obsession with time is overcome in the actualization of the *durée* in pure memory, as an intuition of the uninterrupted stream of becoming. Bergson’s immediate intuitive therefore isolates his concept of experience from history, excluding the tradition of development and collaboration from it.<sup>56</sup> The emphasis placed upon the immediacy of intuition in Bergson’s concept of experience – which effectively *aestheticizes* the lived experience [*Erlebnis*] which proves so problematic in the first place – expresses the reification of human life for the ‘alienating, blinding experience of the age of large-scale industrialism’.<sup>57</sup>

It is not in the contemplative ease of Bergson’s *durée* that the true significance of modern experience becomes apparent, but in Paul Valéry’s recognition of the near-impossible task confronting the poet of modernity. If, for Benjamin, Bergson’s *durée* represents a concept of experience which eliminates time and history, and suppresses the recognition that the task of integrating the moments of lived experience into the collective narrative of history is only possible in the totality which is constituted by death, it is to Valéry and significantly to Goethe that he turns to recover an antinomical experience saturated with a dialectical interplay of phenomenal incompleteness and existential fulfilment.<sup>58</sup> Discussing the phenomenological temporality of such experience, Benjamin

---

56 It is this feature of Bergsonian experience that is shared by Husserl’s phenomenological notion of essence. In Husserl’s mature work, where the fact of experience is taken as a model from which ‘ever new similar images’ can be ‘obtained as copies’ in the imagination, the ‘free arbitrariness’ introduced by the imagination provides the ‘point of departure for the production of an infinitely open multiplicity of variants’, “opening up” the presumptive ‘extension or horizon of actual and really possible particulars’ which is contingently given in experience (Edmund Husserl, *Experience and Judgement: Investigations in a Genealogy of Logic*, trans. James S. Churchill & Karl Ameriks, (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), pp.340-1 & 339-40). To the extent that Husserl’s eidetic variation seeks to overcome the contingent limitations of the object given to it, it nonetheless takes as its basis the immediacy and absolute immanence of the object for the transcendental consciousness and therefore shares this concept of experience with Bergson. In *Against Epistemology: A Metacritique*, based on manuscripts written in 1934-1937, Theodor Adorno argues that Bergson’s ‘intuitionism bears ready comparison to Husserl’s essential insight’, although Husserl’s attempt “‘to come to grips” with “the things themselves” in “ordinary dator intuition”, as phenomenologists like to say, remains, by its proper intention and in contrast to Bergson, in harmony with science...” (Adorno, *Against Epistemology: A Metacritique (Studies in Husserl and the Phenomenological Antinomies)*, trans. Willis Domingo, (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1982), pp.45 & 48). Nevertheless, ‘the point at which the extremes of Husserl and Bergson meet’ is ‘the construction of essential insight (*Wesensschau*)’ (ibid., p.49). This “unfolding” of possibility excludes any reference to historical completion.

57 *OSMB* 314. It is these specific historical conditions, Benjamin argues, which prevent the contents of our individual past [*Erlebnis*] combining in “commemoration” [*Eingedenken*] with material from a collective tradition to form an “experience” [*Erfahrung*]. The protective function of consciousness anticipates and intercepts the shocks of everyday life, isolating them as an *Erlebnis* and in doing so sterilizing and dissolving the integrity of their content.

58 What Valéry discerns in the work of Charles Baudelaire is how the very impoverishment of genuine “occasions” for poetry in the hollowing out of the content of experience becomes the

remarks that ‘Bergson sees in reach before his eyes that which Valéry’s better Goethean insight does as the “here” in which the inadequate becomes an actuality [*Bergson sieht das in Reichweite, was der besseren Goetheschen Einsicht von Valéry also das >hier<, in dem das Unzulängliche Ereignis wird, vor Augen steht*]’.<sup>59</sup>

---

ostensible subject of *The Flowers of Evil* (1857-1868), and the toll that this struggle to recover poetic experience placed upon Baudelaire’s life and work (the same recognition is attributed to Goethe in ‘Goethe’s *Elective Affinities*’, who in ‘his old age...had penetrated profoundly enough into the essence of poetry to feel with horror the absence of every occasion for poetry in the world that surrounded him...’ (GEA 329)). The paradigmatic experience of the modern city-dweller appears in Baudelaire’s *Flowers of Evil* as a desire which takes this inadequacy as its foundation, the ‘gaze...of the object of love...as being spared, rather than denied, fulfilment’ (OSMB 324). The poet discovers what fascinates him in the crowd, but only according to the specific temporality of the shock of catastrophe and passing away: the ‘eternal farewell, which coincides in the poem with the moment of enchantment’ is a ‘love – not at first sight, but at last sight’ (*ibid.*). A similar moment appears in the conclusion to Goethe’s *Faust I*, when Goethe’s love Margaret comprehends her day of execution as Judgement Day, denying Faust and Mephistopheles’s satanic intervention and by doing so being redeemed in death by God: ‘Lost!’ cries Mephistopheles; ‘Saved!’ responds the divine voice from the heavens. Stefan George misses the essence of this experience, Benjamin argues, because for him the crowd as that which brings forth but also *carries away* the beloved is absent, and it is the poet’s *glances* that have “moved away, moist with longing/ before they dared mingle with yours” (OSMB n.35, 348).

- 59 OSMB n.63, 353, translation altered; Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, op. cit., 1, 2, p.639. Even in Goethe’s early account of scientific experience, the imaginative variation which produces a ‘higher standpoint’ has a specific temporal dimension. Experimentation aims to transform the phenomenon into a ‘pure phenomenon’ which ‘can never be isolated’ and ‘appears in a continuous sequence of events’ (J. W. von Goethe, ‘Empirical Observation and Science’, *CW12* p.25). The process through which this higher standpoint is achieved, however, is not via a detour into the subjective in order to grasp the essential unity of the phenomenon in a single moment, as Husserl’s original reduction proposed. It is rather an intensification through experimentation, which does not deny ‘the high and seemingly creative independent power found in the inner faculties through which the evidence is grasped, collected, ordered and developed’, but also insists upon a ‘cooperative method of working’ and the incorporation of collaborative and self-criticism as ‘part of his own experience’ (J. W. von Goethe, ‘The Experiment as Mediator between Object and Subject’, *CW12* p.11). The immediate phenomenon should never be taken in isolation, therefore, since it always bears some interconnected relation to a wider whole, and the ‘greatest accomplishments come from those who never tire in exploring and working out every possible aspect and modification of every bit of empirical evidence’ (*ibid.*, p.15). When Goethe defines ‘the real task of the scientific researcher’ as ‘to follow every single experiment through its variations’, this does not merely imply the imaginative variation emphasised in Husserl’s later phenomenology, but repeated observation over time, in relation to wider experiences, and in critical collaboration with the experimentation of others (*ibid.*, p.16). In contrast to the intuitive immediacy and absolute self-givenness of Husserl’s eidetic experience, Goethe’s “exact sensorial imagination” plays a fundamental role because, Eva-Maria Simms argues, it is only ‘in the human imagination’ that ‘the essential, protean form in time’ and ‘the fullness of time can be grasped and represented’ (Eva-Maria Simms, ‘Goethe, Husserl, and the Crisis of the European Sciences’, *Janus-Head*, 8, 1, (2005), p.170). Goethe compares this objectivity of thinking in science to his “occasional poetry”, in which a ‘certain seed’ lies embedded in a particular impression or situation, which only comes to fruition many years later (J. W. von Goethe, ‘Significant Help Given by an Ingenious Turn of Phrase’, *CW12* p.40). ‘I persist,’ he writes of his artistic production, ‘until I have discovered a pregnant point from which several things may be derived, or rather...yields several things, offering them up of its own accord’ (*ibid.*). Despite the identity of their scientific opponents and the similarities in their phenomenological projects, Husserl and Goethe therefore differ fundamentally in the theory of experience that lies at the heart of their understanding of scientific judgement.

The reference to the final words of the Chorus Mysticus in *Faust II* exemplifies the Baroque melancholy of Goethe's mature gaze.<sup>60</sup> Faust's incessant striving – premised on the impossibility of any moment blissful enough to satiate desire – is subverted into an experience saturated with decomposition and death in the conclusion of the play.<sup>61</sup> It is only (and *only just*) in death that Faust's immortal soul is redeemed and the Chorus Mysticus sing the final refrain which provides the inspiration for Benjamin's discussion: "All that is ephemeral [*Vergangliche*]/ Is only a parable [*Gleichnis*];/ The inadequate [*Unzulängliche*]/ Here becomes an Actuality [*Hier wird's Ereignis*]..."<sup>62</sup> The "here" in which the inadequate [*Unzulängliche*] becomes an actuality [*Ereignis*], according to Benjamin, is allegorically represented not in the fullness of the living present but only in the eternity of death (*OSMB* n.63, 353).<sup>63</sup>

Such a theme is also hinted at in the maxim from *Wihelm Meister's Wanderings* where Goethe suggests that the 'fundamental characteristic of the living unity' is 'to

60 This can be best understood through the dialectic tension between *Idéal* and *Spleen* in Baudelaire's poetry, where a combination of 'eternity and intimacy' is achieved through its 'strange sectioning of time'. What Benjamin calls, after Joubert, the "days of completing time" are made to stand out against the infinite incompatibility of the present as a 'time of hell, which is the province of those who are not allowed to complete anything they have started' (*AP* J44, 5 & J3, 4; *OSMB* 331-2). As a consequence, the city is infused with an 'essential inhuman character' and a mortuary atmosphere of catastrophe and ruination in Baudelaire's *Flowers of Evil*, which Benjamin ties back to the allegorical gaze of the baroque. In Baudelaire's poetry, the fate reserved for the solitary miner in Barbier's poem ("And more than one who in his heart of hearts had dreams/ Of home, sweet home, and of his wife's blue eyes,/ Finds, within the belly of the pit, an everlasting tomb [*Trouve au ventre du gouffre un éternel tombeau*"]') takes on a historical dimension by becoming that of all city-dwellers: in this *danse macabre* of departing souls, the 'commonplace end of big-city dwellers' is the "common pit [*le gouffre commun*]" (*OSMB* n. 32, 348)).

61 The irony of Faust's final anticipation of the highest moment, to which he would dare to say 'Stay a while! You are so lovely!', lies in the morbidity of its context: his grand plan for a kingdom reclaimed from the sea is unknowingly premised on the sacrifice of countless unnamed human lives, the murder of Philemon, Baucis and their guest, and the subsequent blinding and ultimate death of Faust by Care [*Sorge*].

62 J.W. Von Goethe, 'Faust II', *CW2* lines 12104-12109.

63 The value Fritz Heinemann (who claims to have coined the term "existentialism", cf. Udo Tietz, 'German Existence-Philosophy', *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus & Mark A. Wrathall, (London, Blackwell, 2006), p.162) attributes to Goethe's 'concrete phenomenology' in preparing 'the ground for the reformation of philosophical problems' in the mid-1930s seems to lie in the shift towards an *existential* phenomenology, although this affinity has also been emphasised more recently by David Seamon and by Henri Bortoft. Seamon argues that 'Goethe's method is much closer' to the existential phenomenology of Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'since his aim was to begin from and *stay with* experience' (David Seamon, 'Goethe, Nature, and Phenomenology: An Introduction', *Goethe's Way of Science: A Phenomenology of Nature*, op. cit., p.9). Goethe's approach reminds him of the Heideggerian definition of phenomenology in *Being and Time*: 'to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself' (Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson, (Oxford & Malden, MA., Blackwell, and Malden, 1962), p.58; quoted in David Seamon, 'Goethe's Way of Science as a Phenomenology of Nature', *Janus Head*, 8, 1, (Summer, 2005), p.96); cf. also Henri Bortoft, 'Counterfeit and Authentic Wholes: Finding a Means for Dwelling in Nature', *Janus Head*, 8, 1, (Summer, 2005) & *The Wholeness of Nature: Goethe's Way of Science*, (Edinburgh, Floris Books, 1996).

divide, to unite, to traverse the general, to endure in the particular; to transform and to specify oneself, and as the living world expresses itself in thousands of states, to emerge and to disappear, to crystallize and dissolve, to become rigid and to flow, to expand and to contract'.<sup>64</sup> Clark S. Muenzer calls this property a paradoxical existence through self-contradiction, which results in a concept of nature as a landscape 'where endless processes of composition and decomposition transpire under countless conditions to constitute the sensate world as a vast region of liminality'.<sup>65</sup> Under such circumstances organic forms appear as 'arrested stages in a continuous transformation, "caught in the act" as it were, of becoming something else', which also entails – as Muenzer points out – 'the traumatic possibility of its own destruction'.<sup>66</sup> Such a view reaches its apotheosis in Goethe's poem 'Blessed Yearning' from the *West-Eastern Divan*, in which the narrator takes as his subject 'the living thing [*das Lebend'ge*]...that yearns for a flaming death [*Das nach Flammentod sich sehnet*], concluding that 'as long as you lack/ This: Die and Become! [*Dieses: Stirb und werde!*]/ You will be but a dismal guest [*trüber Gast*]/ Upon the dark Earth'.<sup>67</sup>

### 3.5 Benjamin's Dialectical Image: Virtuality and Synthesis

The "now of recognizability" is the 'birth of authentic historical time, the time of truth' which coincides with 'the death of *intentio*', the scholastic idea of intentionality recuperated in Husserlian phenomenology as mental directedness towards an object (*AP* N3, 1). Benjamin's assertion underpins his discussion of the baroque, where the 'heart of the allegorical way of seeing, of the baroque, secular explanation of history...' is a view in which the 'greater the significance, the greater the subjection to death, because death digs most deeply the jagged line of demarcation between physical nature and significance' (*OGT* 166). Whereas "intentionality" describes significance as a relationship holding between the meaning expressed and the object towards which consciousness is directed, Benjamin describes a dialectical conception of history as one in which what he calls the 'after-history' or tradition of reception of a particular phenomenon is integrated into its essence along with its 'fore-history' or the prototypes for its existence (*EF* 261). Calling

---

64 J. W. von Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister's Journeyman Years*, *CW10* p.308, trans. Clark S. Muenzer, 'Fugitive Images and Visual Memory in Goethe's Discourse on Colour', *The Enlightened Eye: Goethe and Visual Culture*, eds. Evelyn K. Moore & Patricia Anne Simpson, (Amsterdam & New York, Rodopi, 2007), p.219, trans. altered.

65 Ibid., pp.221-2.

66 R. H. Brady, 'The causal dimension of Goethe's morphology', *Journal of Social and Biological Structures: Studies in Human Social Biology*, 7, 4, (October, 1984), p.341; Clark S. Muenzer, 'Fugitive Images and Visual Memory in Goethe's Discourse on Colour', op. cit., p.222.

67 J. W. von Goethe, 'Blessed Yearning', *West-Eastern Divan – West-Östlicher Divan: Bi-lingual Edition*, trans. John Whaley, (Berlin, Peter Lang, 1998).

this the Origin [*Ursprung*] of the existent thing in the book on baroque drama, Benjamin clarifies that such a concept is ‘not intended to describe the process by which the existent thing came into being, but rather to describe that which emerges from the process of becoming and disappearance’ (*OGT* 45).

In ‘Eduard Fuchs, Collector and Historian’ Benjamin adds that ‘it is by virtue of their after-history that their fore-history is recognizable as involved in a continuous process of change’ (*EF* 261). As a consequence, the effect or significance attributed to a work ‘depends on an encounter not just with the work alone but with the history which has allowed the work to come down to our own age’ (*EF* 262). Importantly, it is the after-history of the work which enables the very contingency of its fore-history to become recognizable. As a consequence of this dialectical view of history, the work of art “teaches” the historian that ‘artist’s intentions are left behind’ because ‘their function outlives their creator’ (*EF* 262), and the original phenomenon [*Ursprungsphänomen*] becomes ‘apparent only to a dual insight’ which is recognized ‘as a process of restoration and reestablishment, but, on the other hand, and precisely because of this, as something imperfect and incomplete’ (*OGT* 45). The overcoming of this causal intentionality and the beginning of a properly dialectical conception of the historical phenomenon is achieved by blasting ‘the epoch out of its reified “historical continuity”, and thereby the life out of the epoch, and the work out of the lifework’ (*EF* 262).

In a note on criticism from 1930, Benjamin writes that his account of ‘the theory of the survival of works’ is ‘closely linked both to the fact that works cannot be judged, and to the strategically judging stance of criticism’, adding that ‘the whole critique of materialist literary criticism turns on the argument that it lacks a “magical”, non-judging side – that it always (or almost always) gets to the bottom of the mystery’.<sup>68</sup> Against this criticism, Benjamin attempts to develop the non-judging element of a materialist theory of criticism, retaining the mystery of the work’s truth content by refusing to reduce it to an expression of its historical genesis. To do so, Benjamin draws upon Goethe’s ‘characteristically veiled’ comment that, ‘Nothing that has had a great effect can really be judged any longer’ (*EF* 262). He calls this ‘the beginning of any consideration of history worthy of being called dialectical’ (*EF* 262). The ‘ultimate wisdom’ of this comment is expanded upon in ‘On Some Motifs in Baudelaire’, where Benjamin uses it to describe the historical semblance of works (*EF* 262). That which judgement refers to ‘cannot be found in the work [itself]’, Benjamin argues, but gleans what earlier generations admired in it’ (*OSMB* 352, n.63). To be “moved” by this semblance, in the judgement of beauty for example, ‘means *ad plures ire* [to join the many], as the Romans called dying’

---

68 Walter Benjamin, ‘Criticism as the Fundamental Discipline of Literary History’, *SW* 2 p.415.

(OSMB 352, n.63). The contingency of the work means this allusion is not simply a metaphor of the public or the masses for Benjamin, because the dialectical conception of the experience of the historical object includes with it a reflection upon the survival of the creation not only beyond that of its creator, but also beyond that of every particular reception of the work. At the same time, it is this reception that transforms and thereby destroys the very object being judged. This registers the impossibility of any judgement of the historical object in itself and the necessity for criticism to grasp the work's contingency according to a dialectical image of its essence as a historical index. To the extent that Benjamin's concept of criticism is based upon the impossibility of any experience of the work as complete within a historical *actuality*, it retains this Goethean emphasis upon the problematic judgement of the object and the necessity of its semblance character.

When Benjamin denigrates the contemporary reception of Goethe's *Elective Affinities*, it is the circle of critics assembled around the poet Stefan Georg (in particular Friedrich Gundolf's *Goethe*) that he charges with sharing the *proton pseudos* of 'almost all modern philology' in attempting to understand the work '...solely in terms of the author's life' and the 'development of the work in the author by the cliché of an essential image and an empty or incomprehensible "lived experience"'.<sup>69</sup> This results in a view of the work as something completed in the process of its genesis and a history of art which is based 'not on precise insight into the work but on the study of the author and his relations' (GEA 320-1). The work is assimilated into the life of its author, just as – according to the same continuity – the author is assimilated into the historical continuity of his age, which is presented according to an 'eternal image of the past' (EF 262).

The dialectical history which emerges from the allegorical makes apparent 'man's subjection to nature' and 'gives rise not only to the enigmatic question of the nature of human existence as such, but also of the biographical historicity of the individual' (OGT 166). The allegorical vision which culminates in the eschatological yearning of Goethe's mature writing reflects a theory of expression which liberates language from its reduction to human speech and regards it from the perspective of language as such, including the expressiveness of nature. This expansion entails a similar transformation of history, which is no longer restricted to the revealed history of human and organic life – yielding a universal history of causal progress – but comes to incorporate a virtual, inner history of

---

69 GEA 320. An earlier unpublished review of Gundolf's *Goethe* from 1917, as well as a letter contemporaneous with the essay in which Benjamin calls the essay the 'legally binding condemnation and execution of Friedrich Gundolf', corroborates this attack; cf. Walter Benjamin, 'Comments on Gundolf's *Goethe*', *SWI* pp.97-99; Walter Benjamin, *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin: 1910-1940*, eds. Gershom Scholem & Theodor W. Adorno, (Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press, 1994), p.196.



what might be termed *life as such*. This transcendental perspective upon life comes to include the inorganic realms of the artistic, the technological and the produced sphere of “second nature”.

Like the transitory ephemerality of organic nature, the life and afterlife of works reveal them to be things incomplete and imperfect according to their fore- and after-history. Such a dialectical view of history results in the philosophical construction of a constellation which brings the past and present into a discordant conjunction, resulting ‘in the simultaneous preservation and sublation of the lifework *in* the work, of the epoch *in* the lifework, and of the course of history *in* the epoch’ (EF 262). Where historicism emphasises a continuity which progressively dissolves the work into life of the author and life of the author into the universal movement of history, the dialectical view of history which derives from Goethe’s non-judgement involves a disjunctive *discontinuity* which grasps, for example, the whole life of the creator in each particular work, and the whole of history in each particular epoch.

Against the philological conception of historical continuity, Benjamin’s own biography of Goethe – written for the *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia* but published in a shortened version in *Die literarische Welt* in 1928 – therefore insists that ‘Goethe could understand the past, history, only to the extent to which he could integrate it into his life’.<sup>70</sup> In contrast to Gundolf’s neo-romantic reception of Goethe’s work, Benjamin characterises such a life as that of the cultural representative and eventually great critic of the ascent of the German bourgeoisie. Writing in his *Moscow Diary* about a meeting with a representative of the *Encyclopaedia*, Benjamin recalls how the orthodox materialist depiction sought by the editors recommended a ‘biographical portrait against a sociological background’.<sup>71</sup> Contrary to this, Benjamin argues that ‘an artist’s existence and even his purely temporal oeuvre can offer no object whatsoever for materialist analysis’ if ‘abstract[ed] from its posterity’ and its ‘historical after-effects’. In tracing the after-history of reception and scholarship, Benjamin notes how Goethe declined to ‘enjoy anything like the success that his genius merited’ in his own time and that his later prestige only grew with the rise of German imperialism. This culminates in his appropriation according to the nationalistic ideology of bourgeois romanticism: forces which Benjamin had himself struggled against during his involvement in the ‘Free Student’ movement when he opposed the conservative and nationalistic duelling fraternities which traced their lineage back to this Romantic movement, and which would take on increasingly sinister forms with the unifying rhetoric of National Socialism in a Germany desecrated by the capitalist crisis of hyperinflation during the late 1920s.

---

70 Walter Benjamin, ‘Goethe’, *SW2* pp.182-3

71 Walter Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin: Moscow Diary*, op. cit., p.39.

Hence, whilst Goethe ‘founded a great literature among’ the bourgeoisie, ‘he did so with face averted’ and his ‘whole work abounds in reservations about them’.<sup>72</sup> Whilst Goethe was unable to express this reaction against other than ‘from within the framework of an idealized feudal state’, ‘the bourgeoisie has never been able to make more than a limited use of his genius, to say nothing of how far they have understood his intentions’.<sup>73</sup> His purpose in doing so, Benjamin writes, was precisely to give ‘the contents [*Gehalte*] that fulfilled him the form which has enabled them to resist their dissolution at the hands of the bourgeoisie – a resistance made possible because they remained without effect and not because they could be deformed or trivialized’.<sup>74</sup> Such a perspective reiterates a position on the “greatness” or historical significance of writers presented to the Austrian playwright Bernhard Reich, and recalled in Benjamin’s *Moscow Diary*. Reflecting on the ‘the specific structure of “greatness”’, Benjamin argues that whereas average authors are measured by their success, “great” writers are those whose effect is historical, but who, conversely, had no effect on history through their literary powers’.<sup>75</sup> The paradoxically “historical” character of this effect is described in the essay on Fuchs, where the ‘effect that the work of art has on us today’ is said to depend ‘on an encounter not just with the work of art alone but with the history which has allowed the work to come down to our own age’ (*EF* 262). As a consequence, ‘[h]istorical “understanding” is to be grasped, in principle, as an afterlife of that which is understood; and what has been recognized in the analysis of the “afterlife of works,” in the analysis of “fame,” is therefore to be considered as the foundation of history in general’ (*AP* N2,3).

The view of history which emerges from such an understanding is not that of a *human* concern with life, ‘comparable to the hereditary relationships between successive generations’.<sup>76</sup> Such an approach fails to recognise the essential relationship between the transformations of the “great” work, which are ‘timeless, yet not without historical dimensions’.<sup>77</sup> This “history” is distinguished from the ‘extensively temporal’ causal forces of human history (‘the revealed world’) and identified with that possessed ‘intensively’ by the aesthetic and natural worlds.<sup>78</sup> Such intensive forces are said to be invisible to revealed human history, like stars that disappear in the bright daylight of ‘revelation’, and ‘shine only into the [redeemed] night of nature’.<sup>79</sup> The ‘Epistemo-Critical Prologue’ claims this ‘inward history’ has a content ‘not in the sense of a set of

---

72 Walter Benjamin, ‘Goethe’, *SW2* p.187.

73 Walter Benjamin, ‘Goethe’, *SW2* pp.182 & 187.

74 *Ibid.*, p.187.

75 Walter Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin: Moscow Diary*, op. cit., p.39.

76 Walter Benjamin, Letter to Florens Christian Rang (dated December 9<sup>th</sup>, 1923), *SW1* p.388.

77 *Ibid.*, p.389.

78 *Ibid.*, p.388.

79 *Ibid.*, p.389.

occurrences which have befallen it' but as 'the past and subsequent history' of its essential being, which Benjamin defines as the virtuality of its 'natural history' (*OGT* 47).

This radicalized concept of "natural history" is given a more specific example in 'The Task of the Translator', where Benjamin is clear that because 'the translation comes later than the original, and since the important works of world literature never find their chosen translators at the time of their origin', the translation does not issue directly from the original but from its "afterlife" and represents 'their stage of continued life' (*TT* 254-5). 'The history of great works of art tells us about their descent from prior models, their realization in the age of the artist, and what in principle should be their eternal afterlife in succeeding generations', argues Benjamin, the latter corresponding to a materialist account of their "fame". The notion of the survival of great works leads Benjamin to insist that the concept of life cannot be 'limited to organic corporeality' but must be 'determined by the standpoint of history rather than that of nature' (*TT* 255). 'The concept of life is given its due only if everything that has a history of its own, and is not merely the setting for history, is credited with life', such that this 'idea of life and afterlife in works of art should be regarded with an entirely un-metaphorical objectivity' (*TT* 254-5). "Natural life" is therefore defined as the capacity of the life and the inner history of the work to 'unfold clearly and unclouded by human life' (*OGT* 47). The task of the philosopher is to grasp this life of the historical phenomenon.

In the first chapter, a consideration of Benjamin's engagement with Kant and neo-Kantianism sought to demonstrate that, motivated by a recognition of the limitations of Kant's narrowly scientific concept of experience, and inspired by a Hamannian metacritique of pure reason, Benjamin placed the problem of aesthetics at the heart of his phenomenological and ontological transformation of Kant's architectonic. His critique of Kantian epistemology attempted to move beyond Cohen's specific Platonising of the *Critique of Pure Reason* by rejecting the reduction of a dialectics of judgement to the scientific hypothesising of Ideas. He refused to countenance a theory of Origin [*Ursprung*] that posits an apprehension of the rational Idea via a deduction from the facts of science, whose starting point in an empirically impoverished concept of experience could yield only a regulative Idea of a transcendent and infinitely futural task. 'The principles of philosophical contemplation are recorded in the dialectic which is inherent in origin', Benjamin says, but insists that 'the category of origin is not...as Cohen holds, a purely logical one' (*OGT* 46). Whilst for Cohen the dialectic of *Ursprung* is associated with the transition, exemplified in Plato's *Republic*, from the scientific *technai* to the intellectual intuition of the Idea of the Good, Benjamin sought the possibility of a different kind of dialectic, one that has associated here with a refractive and theological version of the Aesthetic Idea. In the process, the concept of *technai* is shifted from the

gnoseological understanding of scientific knowledge to that of science as a practical realm of technological, artistic, and critical production.

The original is ‘never revealed in the naked and manifest existence of the factual’, since its revelation must be capable of doing justice to the essence of truth as a secret: as that which is hidden out of necessity and would be destroyed by any attempt to expose it immediately in its nakedness (*OGT* 45). Here, then, Benjamin implicitly rejects Cohen’s specifically “scientific” Platonising of Kant by emphasising the necessarily mediated appearance of truth. What becomes apparent from the consideration of Benjamin’s theory of expression is the extent to which Benjamin articulates his radical reconceptualisation of Origin according a Goethean understanding of essence associated with a refractive aesthetic experience of truth. The importance attached to the Goethean “Ideal” as a literary Absolute in the afterword to the essay on Romanticism is developed in the Prologue in the context of Goethe’s scientific theory of the *Ur-phänomen*, and it is in relation to this that Benjamin develops his own concept of *Ursprungs-phänomen* in contrast to Cohen’s logical-scientific idealism.

When Benjamin explains the ‘form of the historical object’ which is sought in the *Arcades Project* as a ‘dialectical image’, he invokes Goethe’s concept of the object of a ‘genuine synthesis’ to speak of the *Urphänomen* of history (*AP* N9a, 4). Such a synthesis is anticipated in the epigraph to ‘The Concept of Criticism’, which distinguishes between a mere aggregate and the ‘mysterious synthesis’ confirmed by the analyst (*CC* 116); a distinction which, as Andrew Benjamin points out, implicitly condemns the Romantic “synthesis” as ‘still only an aggregate’.<sup>80</sup> The genuine synthesis is identified with Goethe’s *Urphänomen*, so that ‘just as the leaf unfolds from itself all the riches of the empirical world of plants’, the original-phenomenon of the Arcades would ‘rise to the whole series of the arcade’s concrete historical forms’ (*AP* N2a, 4). The precedents for this formulation are the concept of Origin first described in ‘The Concept of Criticism’ as that ‘determination of the form in which an idea will constantly confront the historical world, until it is revealed fulfilled, in the totality of its history’, and beyond this Schlegel’s Goethean claim that the particular history of Greek art is the natural history of art in general and therefore a primal history of art (*OGT* 45-6; *CC* 181). Criticism as tender empiricism is therefore charged with the dialectical task of synthetically grasping the whole within the archetypal particular: history *in* the epoch, the epoch *in* the life, the life *in* the work, and the work *in* the caesura.

For Benjamin, ‘Ideas – or, to use Goethe’s term, ideals’ become visible to the intellect when recognised in the conceptual act of grouping phenomena together and

---

80 Joanna Hodge, ‘The Timing of Elective Affinity’, op. cit., p.22.

dividing them apart into new configurations, within which ‘the unique and extreme stands alongside its counterpart’ (*OGT* 35). What distinguishes this from the usual role of concepts, making ‘the similar identical’ in the subsumption of particulars in judgement, is the outline of the Idea which emerges in the ‘synthesis between extremes’ (*OGT* 41). Naming does not seek to ‘make the similar identical’ but to ‘effect a synthesis between extremes’ which ‘reveals the configuration of the idea – the sum total of all possible meaningful juxtapositions of such opposites’ (*OGT* 41 & 47). ‘On the Program of the Coming Philosophy’ had at first sought such a dialectical relationship in its suggestion of a ‘certain non-synthesis of two concepts in another’ (*PCP* 106), which develops upon the thesis in an earlier fragment of an ‘a-identical’ infinity pertaining to a non-reversible relation of potential, metaphysical identity.<sup>81</sup>

As he later makes clear in the *Arcades Project*, this ‘synthesis of extremes’ is modelled on Goethe’s concept of truth and represents a dialectical relationship between identity and non-identity which is a very different relationship than that of Kantian “synthesis”. This comes to be expressed in the ‘Epistemo-Critical Prologue’ through a concept of virtuality. An optical, medial model for such “synthesis” was earlier introduced in relation to Goethe’s theory of translation. Here, Benjamin interprets Goethe’s claim regarding the un-judgeability of great works to express a dialectical view of the actual object’s incompleteness as medial and overlapping conjunction of the past and the present. What Benjamin calls the ‘strategically judging stance of the critic’ takes up this negative moment within judgement – the refusal to judge – and, in dialectically conjunction with the virtuality of the Romantic incompleteness, regards the continuation of the work in popular and critical reception not as something which aims at the completion of the work by making it more complete in relation to the Absolute Idea, but rather aims at the work’s survival as a continuation which further decomposes and annihilates the existent thing. The true act of criticism does not progressively complete the work, but permits a recognition of its incompleteness by bringing it into a dialectical relationship with the contingency of the present, which completes it qua work.

---

81 Walter Benjamin, ‘Theses on the Problem of Identity’, *SWI* p.79. Benjamin utilises such a thesis in his criticism of Dostoevsky’s *The Idiot* when he argues that the task of the critic is to ‘grasp the metaphysical identity of the national and human in the creative idea underlying Dostoevsky’s novel’ (Walter Benjamin, ‘Dostoevsky’s *The Idiot*’, *SWI* p.79). Samuel Weber claims that ‘all of Benjamin’s writing and thinking can be productively studied in light of the task of elaborating the “non-synthesis...of concepts in one another”, including Benjamin’s mature concept of the dialectical image, which ‘heightens precisely what Hegelian dialectics seek to over-come: the “disjunctive relation” of the “synthesis” (Samuel Weber, *Benjamin’s – abilities*, (Cambridge, MA. & London, Harvard University Press, 2008), pp.119-120). Benjamin’s account of “awakening”, Weber adds, is his ‘final attempt to meet this challenge’, as a “breaking-point” which is ‘to be distinguished from the power of the negative that informs the Hegelian dialectic precisely insofar as it is *and remains* “a place”...that is not “aufgehoben”’: preserving rather than subsuming conceptual differences’ (ibid., pp.167-8).

The methodological aim of the *Arcades Project* is the establishment of a non-identical “synthesis” between the past and the present which is modelled on the refractive dialectics of Goethe’s concept of truth. As the above discussion of *life as such* sought to demonstrate, this conception of history is no longer reduced to the human history of revelation, but to that “inner history” of natural and technological afterlife. It is this context of “second nature” expressed in art and technology that Benjamin reclaims Goethe’s *Urphänomen* as the basis from which to develop his own original phenomenon, which is neither conflated with the actuality of history nor dissolved into an ideal virtuality of progressiveness. Its aporetic, refractive appearance of historical truth is encapsulated in Fritz Heinemann’s description of the pure experience of the *Urphänomen* as ‘the thing that appears, in so far as it *cannot* appear, because it is infinite, and thus exceeds what can be included in a single appearance’.<sup>82</sup> As an archetypal phenomenon, each part must be grasped in such a way that its essence expresses the life and history of its broader whole: Goethe’s life within the *Elective Affinities*, the emergence of the bourgeois modernity within Goethe’s life, within the baroque mourning-play, or within the decline of the Parisian Arcades, and the whole of history within this primal history of modernity.

### **Coda: the Judgement of History**

The radiance of the natural and aesthetic phenomenon is said to emerge out of the darkness of a redeemed night which awaits ‘no day, and thus no Judgement Day’.<sup>83</sup> This constellation becomes invisible in the bright daylight of the human judgement of the work and the divine judgement of historical revelation. They emerge only against the dark backdrop of eschatological nature. The concept of experience that underlies Benjamin’s theory of criticism is that in which the “‘productive,” “lively,” “positive” part’ of any epoch ‘appear distinctly only insofar as this element is set off against the negative’ backdrop of the ‘abortive, retrograde, and obsolescent’ (*AP* Na1, 3). The negative moment of judgement is therefore necessary and essential to any positive critique, because it is only by establishing such an opposition that it can be recognized. ‘Its is therefore of decisive importance that a new partition be applied to this initially excluded, negative component’, Benjamin continues, ‘so that, by a displacement of the angle of vision (but not of the criteria!), a positive element emerges anew in it too – something different from that previously signified’ (*AP* N1a, 3). This *negative* dialectic increases the angle of refraction in order to permit something new metaphysically to appear within the light of the present, so that eventually ‘the entire past is brought into the

---

82 Fritz Heinemann, ‘Goethe’s Phenomenological Method’, op. cit, p.77.

83 Walter Benjamin, ‘Letter to Florens Christian Rang (dated December 9<sup>th</sup>, 1923), *SWI* p.389.

present in a historical apocatastasis' (*AP* N1a, 3).

The impossibility of judging great works takes on a theological dimension within Benjamin's concept of history when it is associated with a virtual temporality that is differentiated from the illuminated march of human history, and for which there is therefore no actual Day of Judgement conceived as the end of history. In 'The Meaning of Time in the Moral Universe', Benjamin calls the heathen conception of the Last Judgement the date 'when all postponements are ended and all retribution is allowed to free rein' and which therefore 'mocks all delay as vain procrastination'.<sup>84</sup> This is echoed in the 'Paralipomena' to 'On the Concept of History' when he argues that '[t]he basic conception in myth is the world as punishment', a view he associates with a mythical conception of Hell as an eternal recurrence. Benjamin discusses this in more detail in the essay on Goethe's *Elective Affinities*, where he claims that according to such a view, it is only sacrifice which promises the possibility of reconciliation with God.<sup>85</sup> In 'Goethe's *Elective Affinities*', the mythic temporality implicit to sacrifice corresponds to the Nietzschean notion of the Eternal Return of the Same. Such repetition is 'the sign of fate, whether it is self-identical in the life of many or repeats itself in the individual', Benjamin argues (*GEA* 307). 'The Meaning of Time in the Moral Universe' characterised this as belonging to the 'heathen' idea of retribution, which is 'indifferent to time' and 'is able extend its sway to succeeding, increasingly distant generations'.<sup>86</sup> In the next chapter, this mythic temporality will be associated with the religious structure of capitalism.

To understand the genuine character of this medium of time that *we* refer to as progress, it is important to grasp the theological implications which arise from the equivalence Benjamin suggests between the Last Judgement and the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*). Benjamin opposes the implications of this heathen vision by bringing the Last Judgement closer to the Judaic understanding of judgement as atonement. For Benjamin, the 'immeasurable significance of the Last Judgement' is not the idea of judgement and retribution, but its *suspension of judgement* through the idea of forgiveness. The Last Judgement becomes the 'constantly postponed day which flees so determinately into the future after the commission of every misdeed'.<sup>87</sup> Benjamin finds this contrasting notion of atonement expressed in the novella Goethe inserted into the heart of the *Elective Affinities*, in such a way that 'the mystery of the catastrophe...the animating principle of the story, is conducted into its centre' (*GEA* 331).

Whereas the novel represents 'the quiet before a storm; in the novella, however,

---

84 Walter Benjamin, 'The Meaning of Time in the Moral Universe', *SWI* p.286.

85 Walter Benjamin, 'Paralipomena to "On the Concept of History"', *SW4* p.403.

86 Walter Benjamin, 'The Meaning of Time in the Moral Universe', *SWI* p.286.

87 *Ibid.*, p.287.

thunderstorm and peace prevail' (*GEA* 343). The difference may be illustrated through Benjamin's image of Ate pursuing the evildoer through history: a mythical personification of retribution akin to the Furies in Aeschylus' *Orestia*. The mythic conception of the Last Judgement conceives time as the empty space through which this pursuit is conducted, with the cessation of time as the conclusive dead-end in which retribution finally catches up with the evil-doer and divine justice is served. The intensive, virtuality of messianic time is to be distinguished from the idea of human 'progress', because it is the very suspension or deferral of progress which Benjamin associates with divine forgiveness. This does not delay or defer, but *completes* time. Time is, then, 'not the lonely calm of fear but the tempestuous storm of forgiveness which precedes the onrush of the Last Judgement and against which [Ate] cannot advance'. It is not the empty daylight which we identify with human history, but the dense, darkness of a storm: a messianic time of things.

The temporal structure of the *Elective Affinities* corresponds to the quiet before the storm in which retribution steadily advances towards its victims, whereas that of the novella is the peace of forgiveness which emerges within the furious commotion of the storm. For Benjamin, this 'storm of forgiveness' is also the 'purifying hurricane [which] speeds ahead of the thunder and lightning', is 'the voice in which the evildoer's cry of terror is drowned' and 'the hand that obliterates the traces of his misdeeds'. In doing so, forgiveness extinguishes that which is about to face the retribution of 'God's fury' and be 'consumed forever in the lightning bolts of divine wrath'. This conception of the Last Judgement therefore integrates both the positive and negative theological structures of forgiveness and retribution: judgement is not a retribution at the end of history but the interruption which extinguishes the crime and postpones the retribution. Benjamin calls this conception of time 'the powerful ally' of forgiveness.<sup>88</sup> It is a time which endures 'beyond all remembering and forgetting', helping to complete the process of forgiveness.<sup>89</sup>

In the theses 'On the Concept of History', the storm which blows from Paradise is the truly messianic time that *we* mistakenly think of as progress. What has been called the Angel's 'melancholy version of the Faustian *Verweile doch*' codifies into the figures a series of subtle inversions of Faust's Mephistophelian pact. The angel's lament represents an ironic reversal of Faust's original deal with the devil: 'If I should ever say to any moment [*Augenblicke*]:/ "But stay! – you are so beautiful [*Verweile doch! Du bist so schön*]" / then you may lay your fetters on me,/ then I will gladly decompose! [*zugrunde*

---

88 Ibid., p.286.

89 Ibid., p.287.



gehn]!'.<sup>90</sup> Here, in contrast, the angel 'would like to stay [*verweilen*]', not because the moment is so beautiful but because he is transfixed by the unfolding catastrophe.<sup>91</sup> Conversely, what drives [*treibt*] the angel onwards is not a voluntary striving, for, as Irving Wohlfarth comments, 'he is torn away only by the force of destruction itself'.<sup>92</sup> Yet this destruction is also time itself, the time that prevents the Angel from judging humanity and completing history. This recognition is reflected in Scholem's poem, which inspired Benjamin's reading of the *Angelus* and provides a preface for Theses IX. Unlike Faust, the Angel would like to stay, but he would 'have little luck' if he 'remains in living time [*lebendige Zeit*]'.<sup>93</sup> This living time is the transitory time of dissolution and destruction, which Marx speaks of as 'transitoriness of things, their temporality, as their formation by living time [*lebenidige Zeit*]'.<sup>94</sup> This experience of time saturated with the transitoriness of decay has been associated with Benjamin's Goethean understanding in the preceding discussion. The Angel cannot remain, then, because time itself – as a power, or force, or drive – prevents any Faustian lingering in the moment.

This language is reinforced in the Thesis X, which presents Benjamin's theses as meditations designed to strengthen our resolve to turn away from political or worldly striving [*der Welt und ihrem Treiben*] and liberate us 'political Worldlings [*das politische Weltkind*]' to give up our spurious Enlightenment faith in the political programme of progressivism, historical determinism and economic reductionism in which we have become entrapped.<sup>95</sup> The addressee of Benjamin's theses is, then, this Worldling or Worldchild of history. The term first appears in Goethe's autobiographical poem 'Dinner at Coblenz', where it describes the poet caught between the Spirit and the Fire of the religious and the Enlightenment prophets either side of him [*mit Geist- und Feuerschritten,/ Propheten rechts, Propheten links/ das Weltkind in der Mitten*].<sup>96</sup> This subject makes a brief appearance to denounce the moral hypocrisy of the age in the Classical Walpurgis Night of *Faust I*, before being surrounded by a crowd of first philosophical and then political allegorical figures.<sup>97</sup>

---

90 Irving Wohlfarth, 'The Messianic Structure of Benjamin's Last Reflections', *Walter Benjamin: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory*, ed. Peter Osborne, Volume 1, (Abingdon & New York, Routledge, 2005), p.175; J. W. von Goethe, 'Faust I', *CW2* lines 1699-1702, trans. altered.

91 Walter Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History', *SW4* p.392.

92 Irving Wohlfarth, 'The Messianic Structure of Benjamin's Last Reflections', op. cit., p.175.

93 Walter Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History', *SW4* p.392, trans. altered.

94 Karl Marx, *Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. M. Nicolaus, (London, Penguin, 1973), p.361.

95 Walter Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History', *SW4* p.393.

96 J. W. von Goethe, *Goethe: Selected Verse*, (London, Penguin, 1986), p.26, trans. altered.

97 'And thus the pious man you see with even devils consorting'. Worldling: 'Yes, for the pious, I suspect,/ all instruments are fitting;/ And on the Blocksberg [or witch's altar] they erect/ full many a place of meeting' (J. W. von Goethe, 'Faust I', *CW12* lines 4327-8). The philosophical

Again, Benjamin plays upon Goethean imagery here and the Wordling is exhorted to relinquish its political faith in a ceaseless march into the future, to remain in the moment long enough to assume a little of the eschatological insight (if not the religious certainty) which informs the Angel's catastrophic vision. Just as the "fashionable" constantly digresses from its obsession with the present to make new reconnections with the past, the historian is encouraged to make a similar leap, only this time 'not in the [political] arena, where the ruling class gives the commands', but in the 'free heaven [*freien Himmel*] of history'.<sup>98</sup> In accordance with the dialectical insight into the redemptive interior of the allegorical, the storm that prevents completion is also Paradisiacal time itself. Benjamin's use of the term *Himmel* recalls that dramatized eternity which enfolds the narrative of Goethe's *Faust*: the Prologue in Heaven and the heavenly ascension of Margaret which occurs offstage at the end of *Faust I* ('Lost! Saved!') and which serves as the *deus ex machina* of *Faust II*.

Historical materialism must therefore recover a dialectical concept of the present not as endless transition but a *Stillstand*, a momentary pause in which the past and present constellate. Benjamin calls this messianic conception of time one that regards the present not as a transition but as 'the sign of a messianic arrest of happening' which allows 'a moment of humanity'.<sup>99</sup> The theological idea of forgiveness therefore intersects with the messianic model of nature which awaits no Judgement Day, as an eternal passing away. To forgive is to pass beyond all judgement of good and evil: not to forget, but to place beyond all remembering and forgetting. Max Horkheimer's comment that past injustice must be completed for the 'slain are really slain' makes it evident that to construct virtuality as some alternate history in which the dead have not died is to abandon not only the problematic continuity between past and present but even a philosophical relationship of *discontinuity* so important for Benjamin.<sup>100</sup> Nonetheless, historical remembrance can, as Benjamin remarks, 'make the complete (suffering) into something incomplete' (*AP* N8,1).

In his discussion of *Weltkind* in the book *Fire Alarm*, Michael Löwy quickly excavates Benjamin's 'somewhat odd expression' from its Goethean context and associates it with Benjamin's French translation, '*les enfants du siècle*', which he glosses as Benjamin's own generation.<sup>101</sup> But in identifying the subject of Benjamin's theses with

---

figure of the Idealist who follows is supposed to represent Fichte, of whom Goethe, when he heard a crowd had smashed the windows of the philosopher's house, commented that 'he might now convince himself, in the most disagreeable way, that it was possible "for a Not-I to exist, externally to the I"' (Bayard Taylor, *Faust*, (Leipzig, F. A. Brockhaus, 1872), p.279, n.166).

98 Walter Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History', *SW4* p.395.

99 Walter Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History', *SW4* p.396.

100 Max Horkheimer, Letter to Walter Benjamin (dated 16<sup>th</sup> March, 1937), quoted in *AP* N8, 1.

101 Michael Löwy, *Fire Alarm: Reading Walter Benjamin's 'On the Concept of History'*, trans.

a historically specific addressee, he fails to make the connection between this humanist (as opposed to merely political, in the sense that Marx speaks of in his early writings) *Weltkind* and his own reading of the “proletariat” as the subject of history in Benjamin’s later thought. What interests Benjamin in his evocation of Marx’s term, as the ‘last enslaved class’, Löwy writes, is ‘not the essential themes of Marx’s own work – but the life and death struggle between oppressors and oppressed, exploiters and exploited, dominators and dominated’.<sup>102</sup> Löwy describes this as ‘essentially a wager, in the Pascalian sense, on the possibility of a struggle for emancipation’.<sup>103</sup> But the Goethean motifs of Benjamin’s writing suggest this should be understood not so much as a Pascalian wager but as a Faustian pact, one in which all the terms – Faust and Mephistopheles, striving and lingering, beauty and catastrophe – have been inverted. The implications of this reversal are explored in the following chapter in relation to Benjamin’s account of conjuration and the dialectical aspect of phantasmagorical semblance.

---

Chris Turner, (London & New York, Verso, 2005), p.69.

102 Walter Benjamin, ‘On the Concept of History’, *SW4* p.394; Michael Löwy, op. cit., p.38.

103 Ibid., p.11.

## 4. Expressive Materialism and Phantasmagorical Semblance:

### Benjamin's Goethean Critique of Marxism

*Fate shows itself, therefore, in the view of life, as condemned, as having essentially first been condemned and then become guilty. Goethe summarizes both phases in the words "the poor man you let become guilty"...It corresponds to the natural condition of the living – that semblance, not yet wholly dispelled, from which humanity is so far removed that, under its rule, it was never wholly immersed in it but only invisible in its best part.*

– Walter Benjamin, 'Fate and Character'

#### 4.1 Capitalism as Religion: the Critique of a Reflective Conception of Ideology

It is the semblance of the progressive continuity of history that is problematic for philosophy but not semblance itself, which is necessary for the appearance of truth. The former was associated in the preceding chapter with an inadequate and undialectical concept of modernity emerging within scientific positivism. In an early essay on politics from 1921, however, Benjamin attributes this semblance to what he calls the religious structure of capitalism, identifying it with a myth of the continuity of historical progress. Capitalism is not simply an economic structure, Benjamin writes, but a 'purely cultic religion' which, because it has 'no specific body of dogma, no theology', can only produce guilt with no possibility of atonement or reconciliation with God.<sup>1</sup> Because it 'serves essentially to allay the same anxieties, torments, and disturbances to which the so-called religions offered answers', it should be conceived as a religious system, but is also 'the first instance of a cult that creates guilt, not atonement'.<sup>2</sup> The characteristic structure of myth, Benjamin claims in his essay on *Elective Affinities*, is that of isolation from one's own bodily sensuality and the wider community, experienced as an impotence which appears as fate. Benjamin describes the novel as 'giving a critical view' of the European nobility's 'mode of life', tracing the disintegration of the family within the aristocracy as 'a feudal society...restored to its primordial state' by the 'magical forces of fate'.<sup>3</sup> Transposed onto the socio-political realm, this holds that capitalism should be understood as mythic, within which apotheosis from guilt is achieved only through recurring acts of sacrifice.

The nature of this religious structure is examined in more detail through a comparison with psychoanalysis, which Benjamin accuses of possessing the same mythic structure. 'By virtue of a profound analogy, which has still to be illuminated,' Benjamin says, 'what has been repressed, the idea of sin, is capital itself, which pays interest on the

---

1 Walter Benjamin, 'Capitalism as Religion', *SW1* pp.288-9.

2 Ibid., p.288.

3 Walter Benjamin, 'Goethe', *SW2* p.182.

hell of the unconscious'.<sup>4</sup> This "profound analogy" is that of the underlying identity between the religious concept of sin and the economic concept of capital, revealed in the ambiguity of the German word *Schuld*, meaning both the guilt and the interest that accrues upon the original sin of capital. Werner Hamacher compares this accumulation of interest to the public debt that turns money into capital in Marx's chapter on 'So-Called Primitive [*Ursprünglich*] Accumulation'. 'The mechanics of debt – of "advanced" or "credited" money – composes the processes by which value transforms itself into surplus value – which is what defines value as value to begin with', Hamacher glosses, implying that money ('pre-eminently in the form of capital') is 'a god' – generating value out of capital's faith in capital itself – and specifically 'a god that makes guilty, but also a guilty god' because it does so through the mechanics of guilt.<sup>5</sup> The idea of sin (in Kirk Wetter's translation, the 'sinful imagination') does not disappear but, according to Benjamin's account, is repressed and in doing so becomes structurally analogous to capital itself, accumulating interest/debt/guilt in the mythical hell that is Freud's unconscious. In Hamacher's reading, Benjamin's indictment of psychoanalysis indicates that God/capital is unconscious: 'the first and most deeply repressed idea consisting in nothing but guilt and failure, in nothing but absence and nothing but nothingness – and would therefore offer no possible object for consciousness'.<sup>6</sup>

It might be added to this that Freud's unconscious is always guilty; as Hamacher notes, Benjamin 'recognised in the Freudian "unconscious"...one of the signatures of the era of the zenith of guilt'.<sup>7</sup> Hamacher supports this by alluding to 'the Freudian theorem of originary repression', as well as the 'myth of the murder of the primal father' whose repression 'leads to an unconscious sense of guilt that motivates subsequent cultural accomplishments' becoming 'consolidated as the indissoluble fundament of all social and religious relations'. This belief is therefore essential to the surplus by which money turns into capital. But this belief is itself an effect of the cyclical dependence originally generated by the idea of guilt/debt. What is repressive about the structure of capitalism is, ultimately, the idea of the repressed itself, which is used to justify the merely apparent "absence" of any precipitating cause. The 'nexus of meaning' which attaches itself to fate 'can never be founded causally', Benjamin says, because these concepts 'signify a relationship...that is never accessible except through signs, because it is situated above the immediately visible level'.<sup>8</sup> Yet the supposedly original and inherited debt of sin inserts

---

4 Walter Benjamin, 'Capitalism as Religion', *SWI* p.289.

5 Werner Hamacher, 'Guilt History: Benjamin's Fragment "Capitalism as Religion"', *Cardozo Law Review*, 26, 3, (2005), p.903.

6 *Ibid.*, p.911.

7 *Ibid.*, p.911, n. 44.

8 Walter Benjamin, 'Fate and Character', *SWI* p.201.

the individual in a cycle of accumulation whose continuity stretches before and after each generation.

Benjamin's description of the mythical structure of social relations under capitalism has a number of affinities with Marx's own early writings on capitalism and religion, where he points out the continuing religious structure implicit in modern states on the basis of the isolation and alienation experienced within secular capitalist society. The secular emancipation from traditional religion only removes the appearance of a contradiction between religion and state, Marx suggests, whilst failing to resolve the real social contradictions. Hence, in the 'Christian-Germanic state religion is an "economic matter" just as "economic matters" are religion...'.<sup>9</sup> The structure of alienation found in religion is common to civil society, for as a consequence of the worker's estrangement from the products and the character of his labour, and simultaneously from their own humanity and from a human community, the abstract concept of the universal citizen takes on the humanity absent from real social relations.<sup>10</sup>

It is against this mythic structure of capitalism as a "religion without theology" that Benjamin conceives of the necessity of a dialectical conception of history which opposes the false semblance of the continuity of guilt upon which capitalist modernity is predicated. In the preceding chapters, the development of a speculative concept of historical experience was examined through Benjamin's critique of the narrowly scientific and Newtonian "experience" of Kantian and neo-Kantian philosophy, his turn to Goethe's tender empiricism to give a more complex account of the semblance of truth, and his transposition of this Goethean *Urphänomen* from the pagan domain of nature to the dialectical and messianic context of history. The theological motifs of his later writings should therefore be conceived in this respect as the construction of a counter-image for modernity as a "theology without religion".

Benjamin's dialectical concept of history is based upon an understanding of the expressive teleology of nature, which finds fulfilment in human expression. Expanding the content of the historical beyond an anthropocentric concern with human life, historical revelation comes to be reconceived as the expressive mediation between nature and humanity, whose messianic intensity is now registered as an allegorical eschatology of

---

9 Karl Marx, 'On the Jewish Question', *Early Writings*, op. cit., p.224.

10 cf. Karl Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', *Early Writings*, op. cit., pp.327-330. 'This alien essence dominates him and he worships it', Marx argues, ironically suggesting that, 'The god of the Jews has been secularized and become the god of the world. Exchange is the true god of the Jew. His god is nothing more than illusory exchange' (Karl Marx, 'On the Jewish Question', op. cit., p.239). Under the condition of this estrangement, Marx writes, the worker's 'life appears as the sacrifice of his life...': 'The more they want to earn the more they must sacrifice their time and freedom and work like slave in the service of avarice'; that is, in the service of universal god of Exchange (ibid., pp.266 & 284).

decomposition. As a consequence of this rethinking of historical significance, it is the technological realm of second nature – the made, the created, the produced – which comes to express as *Urphänomen* the true appearance of the pure content of nature. ‘To each truly new configuration of nature – and, at bottom, technology is just such a configuration – there corresponds new “images” whose ‘symbolic character’ is met with in our childhood (*AP* K1a, 3). The section entitled ‘To the Planetarium’ from *One-Way Street* explains this expressive conception of technology through analogy with the eroticism of the pedagogical gaze. The purpose of the father’s gaze is not that ‘mastery of children’ violently proclaimed by cane-wielders, Benjamin argues, but the ‘the indispensable *ordering* of the relationship between generations and therefore mastery (if we are to use this term) of that *relationship* and not of children’.<sup>11</sup> By analogy, the purpose of technology is not the mastery of nature but the mastery of the *relationship* between nature and humanity, and therefore the ordering or organisation of that relationship.

In a discussion of technology in the second version of ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Its Mechanical Reproducibility’ from the mid-1930s (passages which are expunged from the last version of the essay), Benjamin articulates these differing conceptions of an expressive versus an instrumental and repressive concept of technology according to a contrast between “first” and “second” technology. When art and technology exists in fusion with ritual, the resulting ‘first technology’ is orientated towards the maximum possible use of the human: an ideological vision which culminates in ‘the irreparable lapse or sacrificial death, which holds good for eternity’.<sup>12</sup> Simultaneous with this exploitation of the human, first technology also seeks to ‘master nature’. Against this mythic conception of instrumentality, Benjamin distinguishes a ‘second technology’ which arises at ‘the point where by an unconscious ruse, human beings first began to distance themselves from nature’. In contrast to the concept of instrumentality involved in first technology, this second technology reduces the use of the human and the mastery of nature to a minimum, aiming instead at ‘an interplay between nature and humanity’.

A footnote to the second version of the ‘Work of Art’ essay suggests that a new *collective* body of humankind has ‘its organs in the new technology’.<sup>13</sup> It is by virtue of this technological organisation, Benjamin argues in the ‘Outline of the Psychophysical Problem’, that ‘humanity is able partly to draw nature, the nonliving, plant, and animal, into this life of the body of mankind’.<sup>14</sup> When *One-Way Street* proclaims that currently in

---

11 Walter Benjamin, ‘One-Way Street’, *SWI* p.487, emphasis added.

12 Walter Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility (2nd Version)’, *SW3* p.107.

13 *Ibid.*, p.124, n.10.

14 Walter Benjamin, ‘Outline of the Psycho-physical Problem’, *SWI* p.395.

‘technology, a *physis* is being organised through which mankind’s contact with the cosmos takes a new and different form’ – characterised as an ‘immense wooing of the cosmos...on a planetary scale’ – a decision must therefore be faced concerning the erotic character that this mastery will take.<sup>15</sup> Whilst the religious structure of capitalism seeks to formulate this relationship according to the brutality and instrumentality of first technology (the mastery of natural and social relations in primitive accumulation and subsequent exploitation), an alternative is postulated in the expressive and therefore theologically redemptive understanding of second technology. This conception of a second technology that reorganizes the relationship between humanity and nature – and therefore between human beings – takes on the character that Marx anticipates for industry in the early *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*: ‘Industry is the real *historical* relationship of nature, and hence of natural science, to man’, because where ‘natural science has intervened and transformed human life all the more *practically* through industry’ it has ‘prepared the conditions for human emancipation, however much its immediate effect was to complete the process of dehumanization’.<sup>16</sup> Here then, what Marx calls the merely ‘*fantastic illusion*’ of a ‘momentary union’ between a theoretically abstract philosophy and an instrumentally practical natural science is achieved for real, transforming them both in this erotico-technological fusion. Marx explains this unalienated organisation of technology as communism.

The structural opposition established in Benjamin’s thought is not so much between capitalism and communism, as between capitalism as a “religion without theology” (and therefore a belief which lacks any conception of human reconciliation) and an opposed conception of a “theology without religion” which is articulated as a communist organisation of technology. Capitalism and communism are not structurally equivalent concepts: the former produces a mythic conception of history, whereas it is an opposing messianic conception of history which introduces communism as the idea of a humanity reconciled with itself and with nature. Where the young Marx argues that ‘the criticism of religion is the prerequisite of all criticism’, and claims that the ‘criticism of religion has been essentially completed’, Benjamin’s philosophy rejects this latter claim by adding that the critical emancipation from religion cannot be achieved through a rational demystification – which fails to root out the mythical kernel of capitalism – but must take on an essential theological form; that is, it must concern itself with redemption.<sup>17</sup>

It is the failure to grasp the different positions of capitalism and communism that

---

15 Walter Benjamin, ‘One-Way Street’, *SWI* pp.486-7.

16 Karl Marx, ‘Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts’, op. cit., p.355.

17 Karl Marx, ‘A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*’, op. cit., p.243.



results in the undialectical version of socialism that Benjamin castigates in ‘Capitalism as Religion’. Benjamin accuses what he calls the “Marxist” version of the progression to socialism of sharing the same religious structure as capitalism, since the ‘capitalism that refuses to change course becomes socialism by means of the simple and compound interest that are functions of debt [*Schuld*].’<sup>18</sup> The crude “Marxism” Benjamin opposes here is implicated in the logic of sacrifice endemic to the mythic structure of capitalism which it intends to overcome. It is present, for example, in *The Development of the Monist View of History* (1895) which encapsulates the Marxist philosophy of Georgi Plekhanov, the founder of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party. Because Plekhanov’s universalist mode of representation remains undialectical, Benjamin writes, it is always without an object and therefore idealistic and ‘nonmaterialist’.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Nikolai Bukharin’s *Historical Materialism* (1921) utilises an ‘unmethodological universality and immediacy that characterizes the totally idealistic, metaphysical questions’ raised in his work.<sup>20</sup>

‘Marx lays bare the *causal* connection between economy and culture,’ Benjamin writes, and ‘[i]t seems, at first sight, that Marx wanted to establish here *only* a causal relation between superstructure and infrastructure’ (*AP* N1a, 6; K2, 5; emphases added). According to Marx’s *German Ideology*, the ideological apparatus of the superstructure – the cultural range of a society’s politics, morality, religion, metaphysics, and art – is the inverted reflection caused by its material relations of production, such that ‘men and their [economic] circumstances appear upside down as in a camera obscura’.<sup>21</sup> These forms of consciousness, the ideological “phantoms” constructed, imagined, and conceived in the human brain, are, despite their semblance of independence, actually sublimates of material life-processes. Whilst the defining feature of capitalism is commodity production, central to the reproduction of the capitalist organisation of labour is the peculiar fetish character of commodities, according to which ‘the definite social relation between people themselves’ that is responsible for the creation of surplus value is inverted and appears as a relationship between things.<sup>22</sup> The relation between human labour and its product is turned upside down, so that it is the commodity which appears capable of entering into relations with other commodities, and ‘evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than if it was beginning to dance of its own

---

18 Walter Benjamin, ‘Capitalism as Religion’, *SWI* p.289.

19 Walter Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin: Moscow Diary*, pp.38-9.

20 Ibid. Bukharin was also one of the editor’s of the *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia*, which rejected Benjamin’s biography on Goethe for, in Benjamin’s own words, being ‘too radical’ (Walter Benjamin, *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin: 1910-1940*, op. cit., p.312).

21 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, op. cit., p.14.

22 Karl Marx, *Capital*, op. cit., Volume 1, p.165.

free will'.<sup>23</sup> Marx compares this inversion to the Enlightenment concept of religious fetishism, the 'primitive, natural and irrational African practice of attributing material things with supernatural powers and therefore a special social value, or animism'.<sup>24</sup>

'But already the observation that ideologies of the superstructure reflect conditions falsely and invidiously goes beyond this [causal relation]', Benjamin argues, because it implies that 'such determination is not reducible to simple reflection' (*AP* K2, 5). When Benjamin claims that the 'economic conditions under which society exists are *expressed* in the superstructure', just as an 'overfull stomach finds not its *reflection* but its *expression* in the contents of dreams', his correction of the camera obscura's metaphor of reflection and his introduction of his own theory of expression serves as a condensation of his specific critique of this undialectical concept of ideology (*AP* K2, 5). It is Marx's description of the 'phantasmagorical form' which the commodity assumes that Benjamin thinks harbours a more complex account of the ideological workings of capitalism, and he develops his own materialist account of expressive semblance by drawing on a concept of the phantasmagoria which is contrasted to the simply inversion of the camera obscura. It is the model underlying this concept of the phantasmagoria which will now be examined.

#### 4.2 The Interpretation of Collective Dreams

Benjamin claims that his own research into 'the expressive character of the earliest industrial products' of capitalism 'becomes important for Marxism' because 'it will demonstrate how the milieu in which Marx's doctrine arose affected that doctrine through its expressive character (which is to say, not only through causal connections)' and 'it will also show in what respects Marxism, too, shares the expressive character of the material products contemporary with it' (*AP* N1a,7). In its opposition to Marx's causal metaphor of reflection, Benjamin's own model of economic expression suggests a more complex relationship between the superstructure and its ideological component, and the forces and relations of production. This can be seen in 'Eduard Fuchs', for example, when Benjamin chastises materialist theory for failing to 'entail even the semblance of an advance in the realm of dialectics', arguing that the previous research undertaken by cultural materialism lacked the dialectical rigour of Marxian economics (*EF* 268). He demands a recognition, on the one hand, that not only do 'the products of art and science owe their existence not merely to the effort of the great geniuses who created them, but also, in one degree or another, to the anonymous toil of their contemporaries' – and therefore the economic division of labour – but also, on the other, the dialectical overcoming of the view that such creations are 'independent, if not of the production

---

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p.163-4.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Osborne, *How to Read Marx*, (London, Granta, 2005), p.17.

process in which they originate, then of a *production process in which they continue to survive*' (EF 267, emphasis added). It is therefore 'an illusion of vulgar Marxism', Benjamin says in 'The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire' from 1938, 'that one can determine the social function of a material or intellectual product without reference to the circumstances and the bearers of tradition'.<sup>25</sup>

Whilst the *German Ideology* of 1845 establishes the basic principles of historical materialism by exposing the independence of forms of consciousness from their materialist conditions as a semblance, Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* offers a more complex account of the socio-political workings of ideology and the role of tradition, a development necessitated the events leading up to the 1851 coup d'état in France. Benjamin's own overlapping interest with Paris as 'capital of the nineteenth century' in the *Arcades Project* eclectically charts this historical epoch through the rise and decline of the arcades. The material collected plots their emergence in the Restoration, follows their development under Louis-Philippe (punctuated by the revolutions of 1830 and that of 1848 with which the *Eighteenth Brumaire* begins), their apotheosis with the World Exhibition of 1867, and their decline with the emergence of electric street lighting and the events leading up to the Commune of 1871.<sup>26</sup> It is a period, Benjamin argues, which coincides with the 'most radiant unfolding' of 'the phantasmagoria of capitalist culture'.<sup>27</sup> The *Arcades Project* therefore offers a supplementary cultural history to the political events depicted so traumatically in the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, radically elongating and expanding Marx's historical perspective and sociological scope in order to better depict the functioning of capitalist ideology.

Benjamin's suggestion in the *Arcades Project* that the ideological superstructure of capitalist culture has the phantasmagorical appearance of a collective dream may have been provoked by Marx's own description of the period between 1848 and 1851, in which the French nation behaved 'like the mad Englishman in Bedlam who thinks he is living in the time of the pharaohs and complains every day how hard it is to work in the Ethiopian gold mines...'.<sup>28</sup> For just as the 'Englishman, so long as his mind was working, could not rid himself of his obsession with gold mining', so 'the French, so long as they made revolutions could not rid themselves of the memory of Napoleon...'. Hence, whilst

---

25 Walter Benjamin, 'The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire', *SW4* p.64.

26 'So long as the gas lamps, even the oil lamps were burning in them, the arcades were fairy places. But if we want to think of them at the height of their magic, we must call to mind the Passage des Panoramas around 1870: on one side, there was gaslight; on the other, oil lamps still flickered. The decline sets in with electric lighting' (*AP <D>*, 6>).

27 'Most of the Paris arcades come into being in the decade and a half after 1822' (Walter Benjamin, 'Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century', *SW3* p.32); 'The phantasmagoria of capitalist culture attains its most radiant unfolding in the world exhibition of 1867. The Second Empire is at the height of its power' (*ibid.*, p.37).

28 Karl Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte', *op. cit.*, p.21.

the February revolution of 1848 heralded a violent and popular rejection of the existing order, at the decisive moment of transformation the 'feeble found refuge in a belief in miracles, believing that the enemy has been vanquished when they have only conjured it away in a fantasy, sacrificing any understanding of the present to an ineffectual glorification of the future in store for them, and of deeds that they had in their hearts but did not want to bring to fruition just yet'.<sup>29</sup>

For Marx, then, the tradition of the past 'weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living' and annuls not only the reality of class interest but *all* interest in reality, to such an extent that not only the 'scum of bourgeois' society but even significant sections of the working class end up indirectly promoting the values of 'property, family, religion, order'.<sup>30</sup> It is clear that Marx's initial model of the camera obscura is redundant here, because what is signified in tradition is no longer merely the inverted appearance of the workings of the real, material relations and force of production. Benjamin, under the influence of Surrealism, initially identifies this concept of the dream with Freud's work on psychoanalysis, and Freud's account of pathological and dream symbolism certainly suggests an important initial model for what was to become the expressive character of cultural products. In his notes for the 1935 exposé of the *Arcades Project*, Benjamin presents one of the "dialectical stages" of his project as plotting the transformation of the arcades 'from an unconscious experience to something consciously penetrated'; that is as a form of remembering that involves an awakening.<sup>31</sup> Benjamin compares this theory of the dream as a 'historical phenomenon' to 'Freud's doctrine of the dream as a phenomenon of nature'.<sup>32</sup>

Transposing Freud's psychoanalytical account of the conflicted psyche upon the collective social sphere provides one model for explaining the withdrawal of the reality principle and the subsequent replacement of the traumatic conflict with a dream or fantasy, as suggested by Marx's work. According to Freud, the breakdown of the reality function is explained by the regression of libido from the real world to some earlier, unresolved fixation which has been repressed into the unconscious.<sup>33</sup> This corresponds

---

29 Ibid., p.23.

30 Ibid., pp.19 & 27. The editors of the latest English edition of Marx's text refer to it more specifically as "politics", that supposedly neglected area of the Marxist thought, which ensures 'not a triumphant march through history but a more complex process of advance and retreat in which economic classes are not always the principle agents' (Mark Cowling & James Martin, 'Introduction' to *Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire*, op. cit., p.7).

31 Walter Benjamin, 'Addenda', *AP* p.907.

32 Walter Benjamin, 'Addenda', *AP* p.908.

33 'The patient has withdrawn from the people in his environment and from the external world generally the libidinal cathexis which he has hitherto directed on to them', Freud argues, and the 'end of the world is the projection of this internal catastrophe; his subjective world has come to an end since his withdrawal of his love from it' (Sigmund Freud, 'Psycho-Analytical Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)' (1911),

structurally to the moment of conflicted crisis described in the *Eighteenth Brumaire* and the subsequent regression to a nationalist and proto-fascist fixation with Napoleon Bonaparte. Freud's model remains problematic, however, because it must explain how the withdrawal of specific material interest (i.e. individual sexual desire or collective economic interest) leads to the collapse of the reality-function in general, which involves a loss of *all* interest in the reality (i.e. the replacement of reality with the madman's phantasy of the Ethiopian gold mines or the French nation's reenactment of republicanism). Freud's solution is to hypothesise the 'possibility that a very widespread disturbance in the distribution of libido may bring about a corresponding disturbance in the ego-cathexes'.<sup>34</sup> In this way, the universality of the pleasure principle is maintained by explaining the breakdown in the reality function as being initiated by a sexual crisis which stimulates the regression of libido back to what Freud deduces is an original narcissistic stage of sexual development. This primary narcissism explains the original transformation of sexual libido into the social drives of the ego as the sublimation of homosexual (because tinged with narcissistic self-love) object-love. The subsequent regression of libido to this unresolved homosexual fixation and the advent of secondary narcissism precipitates the collapse of the ego's reality function in psychoses.<sup>35</sup>

There are a number of psychological reasons to question Freud's assumption of primary narcissism as an explanation for the problem schizophrenic psychosis, and therefore to question its deployment in sociological explanations.<sup>36</sup> Benjamin's own description of the collective dream-world of the nineteenth century, however, already makes it apparent that a different concept of the unconscious is operating in his discussion of ideology. The new images which appear in the collective consciousness of the ideological superstructure appear, Benjamin argues, as a 'dream in which each epoch entertains images of its successor'.<sup>37</sup> Because the collective seek to 'overcome and to transfigure the immaturity of the social product and the inadequacies in the social organization of production', these images are 'deflected...back upon the primal past', wedding the content of the dream with 'elements of primal history [*Urgeschichte*]' which are 'stored in the unconscious of the collective'.

---

*The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. [hereafter *SE*], Volume 12, pp.69-70).

34 *Ibid.*, p.74.

35 Cf. Sigmund Freud, 'On Narcissism: An Introduction', *SE14*. Freud describes the regression of material interest from external objects back onto the ego within a general narrative of sexual development, and explains this by positing an original narcissistic stage of development, responsible for a transformation in the original aims of the sexual libido.

36 Freud argues that the 'strongest of reasons' for adopting this hypothesis lies in its ability to account for 'people whose libidinal development has suffered some disturbance, such as perverts and homosexuals', since in 'their later choice of love-objects they have taken as a model not their mother but their own selves [i.e., a narcissistic object-choice]' (*ibid.*, p.88).

37 Walter Benjamin, 'Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century', *SW3* p.33.

Thus, in Fourier's phalanstery the advent of industrial machinery and iron construction is wedded to a vision of the co-operative organisation of habitation, in the panoramas and panoramic literature the anticipation of photographic technology brings the obscured and excluded landscape back into the urban city, and in the World Exhibition the global exchange-value of the commodity is embroiled with the utopian accessibility of its exhibition. Although these "wish-symbols" of the nineteenth century would be shattered in the development of capitalist production, they still linger on the threshold of the commodity-market in the mid-nineteenth century and therefore retain residues of their utopian elements.<sup>38</sup> Only with the destabilization of the market economy in the great depression and hyperinflation of Benjamin's own era is it possible to recognize them as 'ruins before they have even crumbled'. By bringing the past-future of fantasy and future-past of catastrophe into conjunction it is possible, therefore, to enact a dialectical synthesis which recognises the elements of the dream *as* a dream and triggers the revolutionary act of awakening.

In a letter to Theodor Adorno written shortly after the 1935 exposé of the *Arcades Project*, Benjamin contrasts this practice of dialectical representation with his earliest versions from the late 1920s, in which he was 'philosophizing in a blindly archaic way, still ensnared in nature'.<sup>39</sup> Nonetheless, Adorno criticises Benjamin for the problematic 'complex delineated by the keywords "primal history of the nineteenth century," "dialectical image," "configuration of myth and modernity"', and suggests that Benjamin's concept of the collective dream 'cannot be distinguished from Jung's concept'.<sup>40</sup> The 'disenchantment of the dialectical image' in the concept of the dream leads 'straight to unrefracted mythical thinking,' Adorno argues, and 'here Klages sounds the alarm as Jung did earlier'. If the *Arcades* 'could only be wrung from the sphere of madness', as Benjamin claimed, it has here 'moved away from madness instead of subjugating it', leaving the archaic image intact instead of rescuing it as a dialectical one.<sup>41</sup> Adorno therefore encourages Benjamin to conduct an immanent critique of Jung, comparable to that performed upon Goethe in the 1920s, in order to rescue 'the decisive distinction between archaic and dialectical images' for a 'materialist doctrine of ideas'.<sup>42</sup> This immanent critique would have proved invaluable for explaining the psychological model operating within Benjamin's theologically grounded materialism, but whilst Benjamin agrees with Adorno concerning the need for a critique of Jung and concurs with

---

38 Ibid., p.43.

39 Walter Benjamin, Letter to Adorno (dated May 31<sup>st</sup>, 1935), *SW3* p.51.

40 Theodor W. Adorno, Letter to Benjamin (dated August 2-4<sup>th</sup>, 1935), *SW3* p.56.

41 Ibid., p.59; cf. Walter Benjamin, Letter to Adorno (dated May 31<sup>st</sup>, 1935), *SW3* p.51.

42 Theodor W. Adorno, Letter to Benjamin (dated December 5<sup>th</sup>, 1934), *The Complete Correspondence: 1928-1940*, op. cit., pp.61-2.

the general criticism concerning his ‘inadequate mastery of the archaic’, such an engagement was never completed.<sup>43</sup>

One consequence of this missing work is that Benjamin’s complex relationship to an alternative tradition of the unconscious, which stretches from Goethe and Romanticism to Jungian psychology and onwards, tends to be occluded in favour of more overtly psychoanalytical readings of his work.<sup>44</sup> In her discussion of the Surrealist influence upon Benjamin’s thought in *Profane Illumination*, for example, Margaret Cohen makes the claim that Benjamin’s project ‘to import psychoanalytical concepts into a discussion of base-superstructure relations’ represents a divergence from the Frankfurt

---

43 Walter Benjamin, Letter to Adorno (dated January 7<sup>th</sup>, 1935), *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin, 1910-1940*, op. cit., p.471. Richard Wolin discusses the history of this missing critique in his introduction to the revised edition of *Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetics of Redemption* (cf. Richard Wolin, *An Aesthetics of Redemption*, 2nd Edition, (Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA., University of California Press, 1994), pp.xxxvii-viii). A consideration of this history reveals the extent and limitations of Benjamin’s engagement with Jung’s writings and the political pressures which contributed to its incompleteness. In May 1937 Benjamin writes to Adorno that Horkheimer had ‘certain reservations about the idea of writing my next pieces on Jung and Klages, and that the reasons for this are connected with internal debates within the New York circle itself’ (Letter to Adorno (dated May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1937), *The Complete Correspondences 1928-1940*, op. cit., pp.182-3). Writing in 1935, Benjamin concedes the necessity of undertaking further study of Jung’s work, by March 1937 he had completed a bibliography (Letter to Adorno (dated March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1937), *ibid.*, p.169), and the summer of that year was set aside for such research (Letter to Scholem (dated July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1937), *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin*, op. cit., p.540). But the depth or extent of this research remains unclear. Benjamin had difficulty getting hold of copies of Jung’s writing (Letter to Adorno (dated May 17<sup>th</sup>, 1937), *The Complete Correspondences*, op. cit., p.192), and it is likely that the majority of the published material he had access to dates back only to the start of the 1930s. In July 1937 Benjamin writes that he is studying essays from the beginning of the decade – and some dating back to the previous one (Letter to Scholem (dated July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1937), *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin*, op. cit., p.540) – and he makes separate reference to the “*Eranos-Jahrbücher*”, in which Jung published much of his work and which only dates back to 1933 (Letter to Adorno (dated July 10<sup>th</sup>, 1937), *The Complete Correspondences*, op. cit., p.201).

In the meantime, political exigencies and external publishing pressures lead to the postponement of the planned essay and, eventually, the abandonment of further research. Jung’s infamous presidency of the General Medical Society for Psychotherapy in 1933, along with his editorship of the society’s journal *Zentralblatt*, placed him in disturbing proximity to the Nazi party, and for all the complexities of Jung’s “anti-semitism” the charge most probably sticks, as post-Jungian analyst Andrew Samuels demonstrates (cf. Andrew Samuels, ‘National Psychology, National Socialism, and Analytical Psychology: Reflections on Jung and anti-Semitism (Parts I & II)’, *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 37, 1, pp.3–28 & 37, 2, (1992), pp.127-148). Benjamin notes that Jung ‘recently leaped to the rescue of the Aryan soul with a therapy reserved for it alone’, and that ‘these auxiliary services to National Socialism have been in the works for some time’ (Letter to Scholem (dated July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1937), *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin*, op. cit., p.540), that he had promised to expose the ‘Fascist armature’ of Jungian psychology (Letter to Fritz Lieb (dated July 19<sup>th</sup>, 1937), *ibid.*, p.542), and that it is ‘the devil’s work through and through, which should be attacked with white magic’ (Letter to Scholem (dated August 5<sup>th</sup>, 1937), *ibid.*, p.544). Benjamin seemed to retain hopes of writing the criticism of Jung until the end of 1937. Under these circumstances, the last compositions which are constructed out of the materials of the *Arcades Project* are forced to reject any discussion of Jung entirely, in favour of Freud.

44 This alternative tradition of the unconscious is recuperated in the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari; cf. Christian Kerslake, *Deleuze and the Unconscious*, op. cit.

School that, rather than rejecting Marxist thought, orientates his position towards one now recognizable as Althusserian.<sup>45</sup> However, whilst it is certainly clear that Benjamin *along with* the Frankfurt School in general did not seek to reject but to ‘correct precisely the vulgar ways in which much Marxism links superstructure and base’, it is also the case that the problematic presence of Jungian concepts in his drafts for the *Arcades Project* renders any attempt to understand Benjamin’s concept of ideological expression solely through ‘psychoanalytical vocabulary’ – not least that later employed by Louis Althusser – a misrepresentation of his position.<sup>46</sup> Benjamin’s genuine divergence from the Frankfurt School therefore relates not to his use of Freudian psychoanalysis, but precisely his readiness to draw upon an alternative and critical tradition of psychological thought regarding the unconscious, represented in the first half of the twentieth century by Jungian depth psychology. To the extent that Benjamin’s increasing dependence upon Max Horkheimer and the Frankfurt School during his years in exile prevented the completion of his planned critique of Jung – itself a necessary prelude to any reference to Jung following his involvement in anti-Semitic politics from 1933 onwards – the ostensibly “Freudian” motifs of his later works indicate not a divergence from them but the practical exigencies of his position.

More substantially, Andrew Benjamin argues that the *Arcades Project* articulates a specific ontology of the present, one whose concern with ‘the way both the process and the content of presencing are thought’ may be understood in relation to Freud’s concept of deferred action [*Nachträglichkeit*], and as specifically opposed to Jung’s deployment of the archaic image within a narrative of curative completion.<sup>47</sup> He argues that Freud’s abandoning of the seduction theory for an account of the ‘the sexualisation of events via deferred action’ allows a psychological semantics to emerge which ‘involves co-extensivity between the signifier and the signified’ and, because repression entails that the sign can never be completed, a temporality for which ‘the time of the cure has an infinitely deferrable end’.<sup>48</sup> Freud’s ontology of the present therefore implies that the ‘relationship between what is actual (i.e. present) and that which while not itself actual plays a constitutive role in the mode of presence or the actual, can no longer be thought in

---

45 Margaret Cohen, *Profane Illumination: Walter Benjamin and the Paris of Surrealist Revolution*, (Berkeley & Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1993), pp.54 & 30.

46 Margaret Cohen, *Profane Illumination*, op. cit., p.33.

47 Andrew Benjamin, ‘Hope as the Present’, *Present Hope: Philosophy, Architecture, Judaism*, (London & New York, Routledge, 1997), p.1; Andrew Benjamin, ‘Time and Task: Benjamin and Heidegger showing the present’, *Present Hope: Philosophy, Architecture, Judaism*, op. cit., pp.31-2.

48 Andrew Benjamin, ‘Psychoanalysis and Translation’, *Translation and the Nature of Philosophy: A New Theory of Words*, (London & New York, Routledge, 1989), p.114; *ibid.*, pp.115-6; *ibid.*, p.122.



terms of either recovery or retrieval'.<sup>49</sup> This stands in contrast to a Jungian concept of the unconscious, Andrew Benjamin argues, which represents a reactionary re-assertion of the continuity of 'human nature, eternal values, myths of origin, the naturalization of chronological time', a continuity criticised in the *Arcades Project* for its 'attempt to rid the historical and experiential of that form of repetition identified by the term *Nachträglichkeit*'.<sup>50</sup>

It is the afterlife of this concept (initially in the work of Jacques Lacan in the 1950s and significantly in that of Jean Laplanche in the 1960s) that concerns Andrew Benjamin here, for Laplanche himself has emphasised how Freud's own use of the term *Nachträglichkeit* indicates a temporal movement from the past into the future which he 'never thought...could be reversed'.<sup>51</sup> '[W]henever Freud has a choice between a deterministic account proceeding from the past towards the future and a retrospective or hermeneutic conception proceeding from the present in the direction of the past,' Laplanche writes, 'he almost invariably opted for the former', and in 'defending his view of the reality of the "real" primal scene' from Jung's criticisms, Freud 'never wavered in his conviction that what comes before determines what comes after'.<sup>52</sup> To the extent that the radical semiotic conception of the psychological sign which is deployed in the material for the *Arcades Project* from the late 1920s onwards (prior to the radicalization of psychoanalysis in the second half of the twentieth century) draws upon a psychological tradition, it therefore stands in closer proximity to a theory of the unconscious arising from Jung's early critique of Freudianism than psychoanalysis itself, especially in its rejection of the empirical realism and causal-determinism of the psychoanalytical model.

Moreover, this proximity to Jung is prepared for in Benjamin's early writings by a concept of criticism which emerges from the Goethean transformation of the Early German Romantic concept of the reflective medium. Just as the speculative overcoming of the Newtonian model of experience involves a transformation of the object, so it entails a similar re-conceptualisation of the subject of experience. 'These two problems are closely interconnected,' Benjamin writes in 'On the Program of the Coming Philosophy', and 'even to the extent that Kant and the neo-Kantians have overcome the

---

49 Ibid., p.126.

50 Andrew Benjamin, 'Hope as the Present' op. cit., p.3; Andrew Benjamin, 'Time and Task: Benjamin and Heidegger showing the present', op. cit., p.54.

51 Jean Laplanche, Entry on 'Deferred Action', *International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*. In a letter to Wilhelm Fliess, Freud comments that a 'severe critic might say of all this that it was retrogressively phantasied and not progressively determined. *Experimenta cruces* would have to decide against him' (Sigmund Freud, Letter to Wilhelm Fliess (dated October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1897), *SE3* p.263).

52 'As much as we might wish to find in Freud a dual—perhaps even a contradictory—application of the concept of *Nachträglichkeit*, what we actually find is a highly deterministic one (Jean Laplanche, Entry on 'Deferred Action', *International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*).

object nature of the thing-in-itself as the cause of sensations, there remains the subject nature of the cognizing consciousness to be eliminated' (*PCP* 103). "Cognizing man", the 'cognizing empirical consciousness' of scientific rationalism is merely one 'type of insane consciousness', Benjamin concludes (*PCP* 104). That Benjamin draws upon the speculative experiences of the primitive, insane, psychic, dreamlike and childlike here as models for ideological experience demonstrates the continuing importance of his early work in his later metacritique of Marx's "Enlightenment" rationalism.

When Benjamin criticises Jena Romanticism for inheriting the Fichtean concept of reflection in his essay on 'The Concept of Criticism', he notes how the 'Fichtean "I"... signifies for Schlegel and Novalis only an inferior form among an infinite number of forms of the self' (*CC* 145). The beginning of the "I" – the point in which reflection arises from nothing – was for Novalis 'merely ideal...[and] arises later than the "I"; therefore the "I" cannot have begun. We see from this that we are here in the domain of art'.<sup>53</sup> The Romantic roots of Freudian narcissism, whose paradoxical structure is only properly endorsed in the Lacanian mirror-stage, are therefore exposed in Benjamin's discussion. The 'complete positivity' of their resulting concept of criticism – criticised by Benjamin for occluding the 'necessary moment of all judgement, the negative...' – results in Schlegel's concept of the "symbolic form" or the 'imprint of the pure poetic absolute in the form itself', the indestructible aspect which endures in this infinite process of completion (*CC* 152 & 171). It is in this sense that Schlegel speaks of the way in which 'the show of the finite is set in relation to the truth of the eternal and thereby dissolved into it...through symbols, through which meaning takes the place of illusion – meaning, the one real thing in existence'.<sup>54</sup> Benjamin's criticism of the positivity of Romantic reflection and the virtuality this entails (discussed in the previous chapter) and his correction of the subsequent "meaning" or "significance" assigned by the Romantics to symbolic form needs to be considered here in relation to the psychological concept of the symbol in dream interpretation. From the standpoint of the Absolute of Art, Benjamin argues, the elimination of the moment of negativity represented by the Fichtean check [*Anstoß*] means there is no "not-I": 'no Nature in the sense of a being that does not become itself [*keine Natur im Sinne eines Wesens, das nicht selbst wird*]' (*CC* 145). The Romantic medium of reflection excludes any concept of Nature as a principle of difference, resulting in a pure virtuality of self-identity.<sup>55</sup>

---

53 Novalis, *Schriften: Kritische Neuausgabe auf Grund des handschriftlichen Nachlasses von Ernst Heilborn*, ed. Ernst Heilborn, (Berlin, Reimer, 1901), p.496, quoted in *CC* 150.

54 Friedrich Schlegel, *Seine prosaischen Jugendschriften*, Vol. 2, p.427, quoted in *CC* 171.

55 Marcus Paul Bullock and Winfried Menninghaus have both criticised the partiality and generality of Benjamin's reading of the specific Early German Romantic philosophers, a criticism which will be discussed in the Epilogue.

When Benjamin attempts to retain a dialectical concept of judgement which incorporates the necessary moment of negativity, he does so by turning to Goethe and specifically to a notion of uncriticizability which reasserts the “mortuary” aspect of Nature excluded by Romanticism. This allegorical understanding of death as a moment of completion and therefore hermeneutical significance continues to operate in his 1935 review of Johann Jakob Bachofen, for example, where Benjamin speaks of how ‘death in no way suggests a violent destruction’ for antiquity but, as ‘something greater than life or less than life’, implies ‘the key to all knowledge, reconciling antithetical principles in a dialectical movement’.<sup>56</sup> Death is therefore the ‘prudent mediator between nature and history’, he remarks, rehearsing the Baroque understanding of significance introduced in the discussion of German mourning-plays:

...what has become historical through death reverts ultimately to the domain of nature; and what has been made natural by death reverts ultimately to history. It is no surprise, therefore, to see Bachofen evoking them together in this Goethean profession of faith: “The natural science of what has become is the great principle on which rests all true knowledge and all progress”.<sup>57</sup>

This Goethean understanding resonates strongly not only in the chthonic aspects of Bachofen’s discussion of antiquity, but also in the primordial nature of Jung’s archetypal conception of the unconscious.

It is the contention here that Benjamin’s allusions in the early drafts for the *Arcades Project* to a concept of the unconscious broader in scope than that of Freudian psychoanalysis involves an important recognition of the critical limitations of Freud’s own theory of repression and its usefulness as a psychic model for the social structure of ideology, one that arises from the shared Goethean influences of Jung and Benjamin’s positions. The discussion that follows therefore seeks to defend Jung’s early criticisms of Freud as part of an important and neglected philosophical tradition of the unconscious. Jung’s rejection of Freud’s sexual theory of the libido will be interpreted here not in terms of bourgeois prudishness or New Age spiritualism, but as a recognition that the psychoanalytical account of the psychotic collapse of the reality function leads to a genuine devaluation of the significance of dream symbolism in schizophrenia.

An understanding of the critical validity of Jung’s semiotic critique of the psychoanalytical explanation of the psychotic “end of the world” and his introduction of a hermeneutical principle of psychosynthesis for the interpretation of catastrophic symbolism therefore helps to explain Benjamin’s problematic proximity to Jungian psychology in the early drafts of the *Arcades Project*, and the importance of this concept

---

56 Walter Benjamin, ‘Johann Jakob Bachofen’ (1934-5), *SW3* p.14.

57 Ibid.

of the unconscious for his own critique of Marxism. Jung plays a structurally equivalent role in Benjamin's appropriation of psychoanalytical theory as Goethe does for Romanticism, it will be suggested, and the presence of Jungian motifs in Benjamin's work should not be expunged but subjected to an immanent and dialectical critique comparable to that performed on Goethe.

#### 4.3 Psychosynthesis: Jung's Semiotic Critique of the Freudian Unconscious

Sarah Kofman, in *Camera Obscura: Of Ideology*, critically compares Marx's technological model for the functioning of ideology with that utilised to describe the apparatus of the psyche in Freud's writings, where a 'system in the very front of the apparatus receives the perceptual stimuli,' like the mirror of a reflecting telescope or the screen of the camera obscura.<sup>58</sup> Freud himself admits the limitations of this scheme when he hypothesises the need for a second system behind it, which 'transforms the memory excitations of the first system into permanent traces', like a chemical reaction on a photographic plate or the artist's tracing of the image onto paper.<sup>59</sup> However, the problem of adopting it for Benjamin's materialism also lies in its reduplication of what Kofman continues to describe in Marxian terms as its feature of 'ideological inversion'.<sup>60</sup> To situate the importance of commodity fetishism within an expanded concept of ideological phantasmagoria requires a movement beyond the inversion shared by both the Marxist and psychoanalytical model, and it is here that Jung's critique of the Freudian theory of dream symbolism and the significance of his own account of unconscious phantasy provides a perhaps surprisingly useful resource.

In the Preface to the third, 1911 edition of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud admits that his 'theory of dream-interpretation has itself developed further in a direction on which insufficient stress had been laid in the first edition', concerning 'the extent and importance of symbolism in dreams (or rather in unconscious thinking)'.<sup>61</sup> Freud's recognition of the importance of an expanded account of symbolism in dreams arises out of Jung's criticisms of psychoanalysis and in particular its tendency to reduce the

---

58 Sigmund Freud, 'The Interpretation of Dreams', *SE5* p.536; Sarah Kofman, *Camera Obscura: Of Ideology*, trans. Will Straw, (London, Athlone Press, 1998), pp.25-6.

59 This is exemplified in the permanence of the Architect's sketches enjoyed by Otilie and Charlotte in the *Elective Affinities*, which has been discussed in relation to a theology of technology in Chapter 2 (cf. Chapter 2 above, pp.34-9 & n.108).

60 Sigmund Freud, 'The Interpretation of Dreams', *SE5* p.538; Sarah Kofman, *op. cit.*, pp.25-6.

61 Sigmund Freud, 'The Interpretation of Dreams', *SE5* p.xxvii. It is the theory of sexual aetiology offered in 'Three Essays on Sexuality' which provided Freud with the requisite explanation of symbolic repression he sought, and the 1909 edition of *The Interpretation of Dreams* tentatively offers 'the interpretation of dreams with a dental stimulus as dreams of masturbation', before a decisive footnote in the third edition of 1914 associates such dreams symbols with the theory of infantile sexuality, such that a 'tooth being pulled out by someone else in a dream is as a rule to be interpreted as castration' (*ibid.*, p.387 & n.1).

capacity for expression to the neurotic functioning of the unconscious in cases of hysteria. This ‘analytical-deductive procedure did not, however, furnish such enlightening results in regard to the rich and surprising symbolism’ in cases of paranoid dementia and dementia praecox [schizophrenia], Jung argues and concludes that Freud’s ‘reductive method seems to suit hysteria better than dementia praecox’.<sup>62</sup>

The Freudian hypothesis of a period of narcissistic transformation of libido considered earlier preserves the essential psychoanalytical principle of sexual repression but in doing so leaves analysis with no resources to examine the specific content of psychotic fantasy. In ‘The Loss of Reality in Neurosis and Psychosis’ (1924), for example, Freud argues that whilst in neurosis ‘there is no lack of attempts to replace a disagreeable reality by one which is more in keeping with the subject’s wishes’, this wish attaches itself to a special and meaningful piece of external reality, lending it ‘a secret meaning which we (not always quite appropriately) call a *symbolic* one’. In psychosis, on the other hand, the constructed phantasy is put entirely *in the place* of external reality and is therefore not symbolic.<sup>63</sup> According to Freud, there is no meaningful connection between the repressed reality and the substituted phantasy in cases of psychosis, rendering interpretation, and therefore cure, virtually impossible.

Throughout the course of his work, Jung suggests that there are a number of reasons to take Freud’s own neglected explanation for the withdrawal of the reality function – that, ‘what we call libidinal cathexis (that is, interest emanating from erotic sources) coincides with interest in general’ – seriously’.<sup>64</sup> The productive role of the unconscious in psychic automatism, the problem of explaining the schizophrenic “end of the world”, the difficulties of interpreting psychotic dreams symbolism and the destructive compulsion to repeat exhibited by victims of trauma would all suggest to Jung that Freud’s ‘exclusively sexual definition of libido’ was an ‘untenable prejudice’ which had been ‘historically conditioned’ by the ‘scientific materialism of the nineteenth

---

62 C. G. Jung, ‘On Psychological Understanding’, trans. R. F. C. Hull, *Collected Works* [hereafter *CW*], eds. Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, Gerhard Adler, (London & Henley, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), Volume 3, pp.179-180. Jung recalls how ‘in 1911 Freud, using an improved analytical technique based on his ample experience of neurotics, subjected a case of paranoid dementia to closer psychological investigation’ (ibid., p.179). The case in question, Daniel Schreber’s *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness* (1903), is discussed by Freud in his ‘Psycho-Analytical Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)’ (1911). Benjamin had himself read Schreber’s work and Freud’s subsequent study in 1918, and discusses the religious symbolism of the work in ‘Books by the Mentally Ill: From My Collection’ (Walter Benjamin, ‘Books by the Mentally Ill’ (1928), *SW2* pp.123-4). Scholem notes that ‘Schreber’s book appeal to [Benjamin] far more than Freud’s essay on it’ (Gershom Scholem, *Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship*, p.57, quoted in Sarah Ley Roff, op. cit., p.119).

63 Sigmund Freud, ‘The Loss of Reality in Neurosis and Psychosis’ (1924), *SE19* p.187.

64 Sigmund Freud, ‘Psycho-Analytical Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)’, *SE12* p.74.

century'.<sup>65</sup>

This prejudice is compounded by Freud's attempt to model the functioning of the unconscious in dream symbolism upon the cases of neurotic hysteria that he was more familiar with. In a very early description of hysteria, for example, Freud compares how an incidental circumstance is able to stand in for the repressed sexual event with how a flag or a glove symbolises a soldier's fatherland or a knight's lover.<sup>66</sup> A decade later Freud would utilise the same structure to describe the fetishistic solution to the castration complex, explaining how the incidental fetish serves as a substitute for the repressed memory of the mother's "castrated" phallus, becoming invested as a result with fantastical sexual power.<sup>67</sup> This neurotic concept of the symbol is, therefore, fetishistic and essentially metaphoric, in the classical sense of *metaphora* or "transference" [*metaphero*], meaning to carry [*phero*] between [*meta*]: here between the thought necessarily repressed by the ego into the unconscious and its subsequently censored appearance for consciousness.<sup>68</sup> The Freudian concept of the symbol is dependent upon a specifically repressive theory of the unconscious, such that the analyst Sándor Ferenczi is able to offer a definition in which '[o]nly such things (or ideas) are symbols in the sense of psycho-analysis...in which the one member of the equation is repressed into the unconscious'.<sup>69</sup>

*Transformation and Symbols of the Libido* proposes an alternative interpretation of psychotic dreams in order to demonstrate that psychological symbolism need not be reduced to either fetishistic substitution or meaningless fantasy. Emphasising how the subject in question is conscious of the conflicting nature of her situation, he argues that her transformation of libido into projected religious symbols therefore cannot be exclusively explained according to the mechanism of repression, so that 'we are confronted with an entirely natural and automatic process of transformation' (*TSL* p.59). The hermeneutical principle of repression according to which Freud interprets dreams and pathological symptoms would in such cases be inadequate and for this reason unable to

---

65 C. G. Jung, 'Transformations and Symbols of the Libido' [hereafter *TSL*], *CW5* pp.129-130; C. G. Jung, 'Depth Psychology' (1948), *CW18* p.479.

66 Sigmund Freud, 'Project for a Scientific Psychology' (1895), *SE1* p.349.

67 For Freud this substitution is 'with some justice likened to the fetishes in which savages believe that their gods are embodied' (Sigmund Freud, 'Three Essays on Sexuality' (1905), *SE7* p.153).

68 Henry Liddell & George Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996), p.1118. Aristotle, for example, defines metaphor as 'the application of a strange term either transferred from the genus and applied to the species, or from the species and applied to the genus, or from one species to another, or else by analogy' (Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Malcolm Heath, (London, Penguin, 1996), p.134).

69 Sándor Ferenczi, 'The Ontogenesis of Symbols' (1913), *Contributions to Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Ernest Jones, (London, Stanley Phillips, 1916), p.234. In a footnote to this argument, Ferenczi comments: 'See on this matter my...review of Jung's Libido essay...' (ibid.).

find meaning to their content and with this the possibility of resolution. This “censorship” explanation is itself a ruse typical of neurosis, Jung argues, in which ‘one makes oneself and others believe that the problem is purely sexual, that the trouble started long ago and that its causes lies in the remote past’.<sup>70</sup> ‘This provides a heaven-sent way out of the problem of the present,’ he insists, ‘by shifting the whole question on to another and less dangerous plane’ (*TSL* 329).

If introversion concerns a withdrawal of interest from the external reality of people and things not arising from a repressed sexual conflict, then we can no longer assume that the libido withdrawn is of an exclusively sexual nature. Jung therefore explains the psychotic “end of the world” which proved so problematic for Freudian psychoanalysis by retaining the notion of a reversal of libido, but redefining libido as desire in general. The withdrawal of specific sexual interest from the world does not necessarily constitute a psychotic breakdown because the subject retains a material interest in reality as such; on the other hand, the withdrawal of material interest directly accounts for the loss of reality. Although this problem of schizophrenic introversion raised by Jung in 1911 challenged the sexual theory of libido, Freud only conceded the inadequacy of his existing concept of the unconscious in his 1920 essay ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’. Here, he admits that if no other drives are visible to explain the traumatic compulsion to repeat experienced by soldiers returning from the First World War, ‘we shall after all be driven to agree with...innovators like Jung who, making a hasty judgement, have used the word “libido” to mean ‘drive’ [*Triebkraft*] in general’.<sup>71</sup> The hypothesis of a death drive, ‘more primitive...and independent of’ the libidinal pleasure principle permits him to avoid this conclusion, although he admits that ‘we are without a term analogous to “libido” for describing the energy of [this] destructive drive’.<sup>72</sup>

---

70 *TSL* 329. Jung’s own familiarity with schizophrenic rather than neurotic patients led him to question the universality of Freud’s theory of the sexual aetiology of pathological symbols. In his 1907 study of schizophrenia, Jung emphasises ‘the numerous analogical connections’ which follow from the ‘ambiguity of individual dream-images’, a characteristic which he associates with ‘Freud’s “overdetermination”’. Declaring his indebtedness to Freud, he also distances his thought from any ‘unqualified submission to dogma’ and proposes to explain such overdetermination from ‘a rather different standpoint’ (C. G. Jung, ‘The Psychology of Dementia Praecox’, *CW3* pp.62 & 4).

71 Sigmund Freud, ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’, *SE18* p.52-3, translation altered.

72 *Ibid.*, p.52; Sigmund Freud, ‘An Outline of Psychoanalysis’ (1940), *SE23* pp.149-150, trans. altered. Freud concedes that with this “hidden” drive it ‘looks suspiciously as though we were trying to find a way out of a highly embarrassing situation at any price’. He manages to enlist a theory of sadism, as the deflection of this death drive away from the ego and onto a sexual object, in order to produce the required example (Sigmund Freud, ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’, *SE18* pp.53-4). As with his explanation of schizophrenic introversion, this implies ‘an important amplification of the theory of narcissism’, as well as necessitating the supposition of a primary masochism to explain masochistic self-destruction as the regression to an earlier phase of the drive’s history (Sigmund Freud, ‘The Ego and the Id’, *SE19* pp.40-1 & ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’, *SE18* pp.54-5).

Freud distinguishes his revised concept of the unconscious by emphasising his own 'dualistic' theory of drives in contrast to Jung's 'monistic' one.<sup>73</sup> However, Jung argues that this dualism is merely a 'concession to intellectual logic' which, as a result of Freud's unrevised concept of libido, ends up undialectically reifying the pleasure principle and its opposite.<sup>74</sup> Since Freud begins from the mistaken assumption that Eros is equivalent to the organic sphere of reproductive life, he takes its opposite to be a biological, rather than philosophical, concept of death. Consequently, even when psychoanalytical theory accedes to this more complex and necessary account of the drives, it nonetheless retains an essentially conservative concept of the unconscious. For Freud a 'drive is an urge inherent to organic life to restore to an earlier state of things...an expression of the conservative nature [*konservativen Natur*] of living substance'.<sup>75</sup> It is 'sufficiently obvious' for Jung, in contrast, 'that life, like any other process, has a beginning and an end and that every beginning is also the beginning of the end', implying that 'every process is a phenomenon of energy, and that all energy can proceed only from the tension of opposites'.<sup>76</sup>

Jung therefore describes this dialectical opposition as implying 'not so much a question of a death drive as of that "other" drive (Goethe) which signifies spiritual life' (*TSL* 328, n.28, trans. altered). The meaning of this destructive, Goethean aspect of the unconscious is clarified in Jung's discussion of the dialectical aspect of images such as the Mother imago. Whilst the 'primordial image of the setting sun' represents a 'deadly longing for the abyss, a longing to drown in his own source, to be sucked down into the realm of the [Faustian] Mothers', this destructive descent also holds out the potential for ascent, psychic rebirth and the subsequent after-life of the transformed subject (*TSL* 355 & 357). In a letter to Freud from June 1911, Jung writes that the 'unconscious fantasies contain a whole lot of relevant material, and bring the inside to the outside as nothing else can, so that I see a faint hope of getting at even the "inaccessible" cases by this means'.<sup>77</sup> He goes on to call this destructive/productive realm of the unconscious an 'amazing witches' cauldron', citing Goethe's description of the Faustian realm of the Mothers as 'Formation, transformation,/ Eternal Mind's eternal recreation./ Thronged round with images of things to be,/ They see you not, shadows are all they see'.<sup>78</sup> Similarly, *Transformation and Symbols of the Libido* insists that the 'the vanishing shapes are

---

73 Ibid., pp.53-4 (sentence added in 1921).

74 C. G. Jung, 'On the Psychology of the Unconscious', *CW*7 p.54.

75 Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', *SE*18 p.36, trans. altered.

76 C. G. Jung, 'On the Psychology of the Unconscious', *CW*7 pp.28-29.

77 C. G. Jung, Letter (dated June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1911), *The Freud-Jung Letters: The Correspondence between Sigmund Freud and C. G. Jung* (Princeton, NJ., Princeton University Press, 1974), pp.430-1.

78 Ibid., pp.430-1; cf. J. W. von Goethe, 'Faust II', *CW*2 lines 6287-6290, trans. altered.



shaped anew, and a truth is valid in the end only if it suffers change and bears new witness in new images...' (*TSL* 357).

Contrary to Freud's theory of sexual development, this fantastical character of the Jung's productive unconscious implies it is always essentially "narcissistic", in that it creatively seeks to adapt the world it encounters to subjective fantasies and expectations (*TSL* 21). The dropping away of the latest stage of directed thinking does not require the hypothesis of a historically repressed conflict, but only what he calls an introversion to this non-directed or fantasy form of thinking as the destructive but also potentially productive response of the unconscious to the precipitating problem. Freud characterises such a delusional effort as the "magical thinking" found in children, madmen and 'primitive peoples': 'In the latter we find characteristics which, if they occurred singly, might be put down to megalomania: an over-estimation of the power of their wishes and mental acts, the "omnipotence of thoughts", a belief in the thaumaturgic force of words, and a technique for dealing with the external world - "magic" - which appears to a logical application of these grandiose premises'.<sup>79</sup> Whereas Freud's destructive drive ultimately betrays itself as a regressive primitivism manifested in the impression of 'being pursued by a malignant fate or possessed by some "daemonic" power', that autonomy of the psyche which is experienced as daemonic or magical for Jung stems precisely from our 'fantastical *denial* of the existence of fragmentary autonomous systems' in the human psyche', specifically our denial 'that these systems are experienceable'.<sup>80</sup> What Freud calls the death drive represents that tendency to dissociation which Jung regards as inherent to the human psyche, and whose denial itself 'entails a great psychic danger, because the autonomous systems then become like any other repressed contents'.<sup>81</sup>

The Freudian theory of repression itself serves to repress and deny the experience and activity of the non-human, non-biographical, and therefore non-historical "Nature" at the heart of the human psyche, which manifests itself as a consequence in the violent, irrational and daemonic. Freud's 'negative and reductive attitude towards cultural values...towards myth and religion' and towards 'complex psychic phenomenon like art, philosophy, and religion' is inherently dangerous, Jung argues, because it regards them as

---

79 Sigmund Freud, 'On Narcissism: An Introduction', *SE14* p.75.

80 C. G. Jung, 'A Psychological View of Conscience', *CW10* p.446, emphasis added; C. G. Jung, 'Commentary on "The Secret of the Golden Flowers"', *CW13* p.36. Benjamin speaks of the presence of the daemonic in Goethe's *Elective Affinities* in a similar way. 'At the height of their cultivation', he says of the central protagonists, 'they are subject to the forces that cultivation claims to have mastered, even if it may forever prove important to curb them' (*GEA* 304). Similarly, in 'Fate and Character', Benjamin calls the 'order of law...a residue of the demonic stage of human existence...[which] has preserved itself long past the time of the victory over the demons' and associates this 'guilt context of the living' with an inauthentic temporality 'very different in its kind and measure from the time of redemption, or of music, or of truth' (Walter Benjamin, 'Fate and Character', *SW1* p.203-4).

81 C. G. Jung, 'Commentary on "The Secret of the Golden Flowers"', *CW13* p.36.

‘...“nothing but” the outcome of sexual repression’.<sup>82</sup> What Freud excludes from the sphere of the psychological significant and therefore treatable corresponds to the productive sphere of the psyche which Jung comes to define as the collective unconscious. This psychotic symbolism is at times brought into the orbit of Kant’s expanded sense of the imagination in its productive capacity as *fantasy*.<sup>83</sup> Kant’s account of symbolic exhibition, associated in the previous chapters with the productive power of the imagination, offers a philosophical resource for developing this alternative concept of the unconscious. For Kant the Aesthetic Idea is an unexpoundable ‘*intuition* (of the imagination)’ for which the understanding can find no adequate concept (*CJ Ak.* 342). Similarly, Jung argues that phantasy production in psychopathology and in dreams involves symbols as ‘indefinite expression[s] with many meanings, pointing to something not easily defined and therefore not fully known’ (*TSL* 124). He goes on, in *The Role of the Unconscious* (1919), to associate this productivity with a theory of archetypes as, in the Kantian sense, ‘innate possibilities of ideas, *a priori* conditions for fantasy production’.<sup>84</sup>

As a consequence of this philosophical theory of the unconscious, Jung demands that psychoanalysis adopts an expanded concept of the symbol. ‘*Symbols* are not allegories and not signs’, Jung argues, ‘they are images of contents which for the most part transcend consciousness’ (*TSL* 77-8). The true symbol should therefore be ‘understood as an *expression* of an intuitive idea that cannot yet be formulated in any other or better way’.<sup>85</sup> The Jungian symbol is not fetishistic in character (a fixed substitute for the repressed whole), but magical or phantastical: a transformer of libido, ‘an idea that can give equivalent expression to the libido and canalize it into a form different from original one’.<sup>86</sup> It is for this reason that Christian Kerslake describes the psychotic introversion to a non-directed thinking in terms of the “world as symbol”.<sup>87</sup> This Jungian concept of expression stands in contrast to the Freudian semiotics of repression because it insists that the content of dreams and fantasies may take on symbolic form not because of censorship but because they are constitutively unable to be fully expressed.

Finally, Jung’s critique of Freud’s account of psychological significance demands a shift in the interpretative perspective, from a realism which ‘equates the dream images

---

82 C. G. Jung, ‘Depth Psychology’ (1948), *CW18* p.479.

83 Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, op. cit., *Ak.* 167.

84 C. G. Jung, ‘The Role of the Unconscious’, *CW10* p.14.

85 C. G. Jung, ‘On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry’ [hereafter *RAPP*], *CW15* p.77, emphasis added, quoted in Christian Kerslake, *Deleuze and the Unconscious* op. cit., p.106.

86 C. G. Jung, ‘On Psychic Energy’, *CW8* p.48.

87 cf. Christian Kerslake, *Deleuze and the Unconscious*, op. cit., p.76.

with real-objects' to a theory of unconscious expression which 'refers every part of the dream and all the actors in it back to the dreamer'.<sup>88</sup> When Freud's 'analytical or causal-reductive interpretation ceases to bring to light anything new, but only the same thing in different variations,' Jung argues, then a constructive approach is required to grasp the fantastical or phantasmagorical significance of the symbols of unconscious expression. Jung contrasts this constructive approach, or "amplification", with psychoanalysis by deeming it a process of psychosynthesis: 'From the comparative analysis of many systems the typical formations can be discovered. If one can speak of a reduction at all, it is simply a reduction to general types, but not to some general principle arrived at inductively or deductively, such as "sexuality" [Freud] or "striving for power" [Adler]'.<sup>89</sup> Whereas Freudian analysis is rooted in an empirical realism which reasserts the bourgeois semiotics of communication (the fantasy-content expresses a repressed thought which stands in for a traumatic event), Jung's insistence on the necessity of psychological synthesis follows from an alternative conception of expression, which takes the material substrate itself to be striving for articulation.

As Paul Bishop remarks, Jung's "constructive standpoint" distinguishes itself by...elaborating [things] to a more complicated and – in a Goethean sense – "higher level" (*elaboriert Komplizierteres und Höheres*), and, in this sense, it is "speculative" (*spekulativ*).<sup>90</sup> Jung's introduction of the archetype should be understood as a psychological counterpart to the Goethean *Urphänomen*, the consequence of a speculative concept of psychological experience which proceeds from the standpoint not of an empirical realism but a transcendental empiricism. Jung claims that such speculative construction should not be confused with 'scholastic speculation', for it 'never asserts that something has universal validity, but merely subjective value' and that this value is concerned with what he calls "redemption" (*Erlösung*).<sup>91</sup>

The affinity between the psychosynthesis that develops out of Jung's critique of Freudian psychoanalysis and the concept of criticism that emerges from the early Benjamin's Goethean critique of Romanticism therefore help to explain the "Jungian" motifs which appear in the psychological model of ideology he employs from the late 1920s onwards, and which continue to linger in his work from the 1930s (to Adorno's evident concern). In his discussion of the *Arcades Project's* criticism of Jungian psychology, Andrew Benjamin emphasises how Jung's concept of the unconscious is a reactionary 'naturalization of chronological time' which reasserts the eternal values of

---

88 C. G. Jung, 'On the Psychology of the Unconscious', *CW7* p.84.

89 *Ibid.*, p.87.

90 Paul Bishop, *Analytical Psychology and German Classical Aesthetics*, (Hove & New York, Routledge, 2008), Volume 1: The Development of Personality, p.75.

91 C. G. Jung, 'On the Psychology of the Unconscious', *CW7* pp.185-6.

some original human nature.<sup>92</sup> To the extent that Jung comes to shift his theory of the archetypes of the collective unconscious away from their philosophical and critical relationship to the Freudian interpretation of dream symbolism and towards a biological notion of innate residual traces of habitual experience this objection is certainly true. However, the temporal ‘co-extensivity between the signifier and the signified’ which Andrew Benjamin seeks to rescue from his criticism remains closer to Jung’s critique of psychoanalytical realism than to orthodox Freudianism, and the critique of Jung which occurs in the *Arcades Project* should therefore be understood as a dialectical “rescuing” of the concept of the primal image in Jung’s work, rather than its rejection.<sup>93</sup> The problems that arise from the elimination of Jung are apparent when Andrew Benjamin speaks of the linguistic medium of interpretation as an ‘infinitely deferrable end’, a description which recuperates a neo-Romantic Lacanianism of virtuality which once again excludes any conception of death and therefore semblance of completion from its idea of becoming.<sup>94</sup>

In a letter to Benjamin from 1935, Adorno offers a critical reformulation for the concept of the dialectical image as it appears in ‘Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century’. ‘Dialectical images...are instantiated in the moment of indifference between death and meaning’, he writes, for whilst ‘things in appearance are awakened to what is newest, death transforms the meanings to what is most ancient’.<sup>95</sup> Adorno offered this formulation as a critique of Jung’s archaic concept of the constellation, which he argues Benjamin had uncritically adopted. The original, theological power of the concept – its eschatological dimension – is sacrificed by becoming immanent and disenchanted in this way, and as a consequence the dialectical character of the fetish – the commodified world as hell – is also lost. Adorno proposes as an alternative principle: ‘Each epoch dreams of itself as annihilated by catastrophes’.<sup>96</sup> When Benjamin incorporates a version of Adorno’s dictum – quoted from an earlier letter of June 5<sup>th</sup> 1935 – into Convolute K of the *Arcades Project* (‘The recent past always presents itself as though annihilated by catastrophes’ (AP K4, 3)), he immediately precedes it with a lengthy citation from the

---

92 Andrew Benjamin, ‘Hope as the Present’, op. cit., p.3; Andrew Benjamin, ‘Time and Task: Benjamin and Heidegger showing the present’, op. cit., p.54.

93 Andrew Benjamin, ‘Psychoanalysis and Translation’, op. cit., p.115-6.

94 Ibid., p.122. John McCole argues that the ‘tenor of Benjamin’s messianism also separates him fundamentally from the founder of psychoanalysis. Freud, who professed the classical Enlightenment faith in science, was as confident of its ability to guarantee gradual progress as he was wary of ultimate solutions. By contrast, Benjamin espoused a messianic creed of radical history discontinuity, of awakening and liquidation of mythic forces. Their ways of understanding the temporal relationship between dreams and the waking world differed accordingly’ (John Joseph McCole, *Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition*, (Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 1993), pp.294-5).

95 Theodor W. Adorno, Letter to Walter Benjamin (dated August 5<sup>th</sup>, 1935), *SW3* p.63.

96 Theodor W. Adorno, Letter to Walter Benjamin (dated August 2-4<sup>th</sup>, 1935), *SW3* p.58.

Surrealist anthropologist Pierre Mabilie. The passage, published in the Winter 1935 edition of the Surrealist journal *Minotaure* edited by Mabilie and therefore inserted into the material after Adorno's intervention, concerns the 'predominantly collective' "unconscious of oblivion", in which 'the mass of things learned in the course of the centuries and in the course of a life, things which were once conscious and which, by diffusion, have entered oblivion', an 'enormous labour undertaken in the shadows [which] comes to light in dreams, thoughts, decisions, and above all at moments of crisis or of social upheaval...'.<sup>97</sup>

The catastrophic should not be conceived as the conservative regression of Freud's death drive, therefore, but the immanently dialectical yearning of the psychotic phantasy. Jung's early writing grasps the dialectical aspect of this desire with its concept of an expressive libidinal Nature bubbling away beneath the conscious surface of human History, and its Goethean recognition of the incessant but impossibly mortuary aspect of this vitality. Whereas Freud isolates and separates the pleasure principle and the death drive as essentially conservative forces towards de-animation, for Jung the utopian wish and the catastrophic impulse are aspects of one and the same movement. The relation between this catastrophic aspect of psychotic phantasy and the dialectical image of history is reinforced by the correspondences between Benjamin's theses *On the Concept of History* and Gérard de Nerval's 1855 novel *Aurélia*. Whilst the inspiration of Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus* and Friedrich Schlegel's 'backward looking prophet' upon Benjamin's famous image of the angel of history has received much attention, the vision of history as catastrophe which is crucial to Benjamin's allegorical figure echoes the psychotic tropes of the dreams of *Aurélia*'s semi-autobiographical narrator. The angel's vision of history as 'one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it at his feet...[so that] the pile of debris before him grows towards the sky' appears like an afterimage of Nerval's cadaverous dreams, which signal the onset of psychotic breakdown in *Aurélia*.<sup>98</sup> 'Then I thought I had found myself in the middle of an enormous slaughterhouse where world history was written in letters of blood,' Nerval writes: 'The body of a gigantic woman was painted opposite me; only, her various parts were sliced off as if by a sabre, other women of various races and whose bodies piled up higher and higher, formed a bloody, tangled heap of limbs and heads on the other walls. It was the history of all crime'.<sup>99</sup>

---

97 Pierre Mabilie, 'Préface à *L'Eloge des préjugés populaires*', *Minotaure*, 2, 6, (Winter, 1935), p.2, quoted in AP K4, 2.

98 Walter Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History', *SW4* p.392.

99 Gérard de Nerval, 'Aurélia', *Oeuvres*, ed. Henri Lemaître, (Paris, Garnier, 1958), ), p.815, trans. Laurence M. Porter, 'Real Dreams, Literary Dreams, and the Fantastic in Literature', *The Dream and the Text: Essays on Literature and Language*, ed. Carole Schreier Rupprecht,

#### 4.4 The Phantasmagoria of Ideology

Whilst the immanent critique of Jung that Adorno encouraged was never written, the *Arcades Project* – and in particular Convolutes N and K, which represent the equivalent ‘epistemo-critical’ moments of the work – permit an insight into the form that critique would have taken. What Andrew Benjamin describes as a concern with ‘the way both the process and the content of presencing are thought’ forms part of a specific criticism of Jung in the work, which will be discussed here in relation to a broader critique of Jung’s own misunderstanding of the Goethean symbol.<sup>100</sup> Importantly, Benjamin’s most explicit rejection of Jung concerns not the theory of primal images per se, but Jung’s description of their artistic function in his essay ‘On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry’ (1931). Benjamin’s comment that this work brings to light the ‘unequivocally regressive function which the doctrine of archaic images’ has for Jung situates this critique within the context of his own development of an ‘esoteric theory of art’, which has been discussed in relation to the expressiveness of the *Urphänomen* in the previous chapters (*AP* N8, 2). Jung’s concern in this essay is with how ‘a poet who has gone out of fashion is suddenly rediscovered’ when ‘something new’ is discovered in the work which ‘was always present...but was hidden in a symbol, and only a renewal of the spirit of the time permits us to read its meaning’ (*RAPP* 77). Ostensibly, Jung’s concern overlaps with Benjamin’s own interest in the after-life of works. For Jung, the ‘symbol remains a perpetual challenge to our thought and feelings’, whose “meaning” needs to be understood in terms of Gerhard Hauptmann’s “resonances of the primordial world”

---

(Albany, NY., SUNY, 1993), p.40; Marie-Louise von Franz, *Alchemy: An Introduction to the Symbolism and the Psychology*, (Toronto, Inner City Books, 1980), p.217. In another dream, the narrator sees an angel of God who had fallen and become stuck in the constricted back alley of a Parisian hotel: ‘The sudden realization for the man was that if the angel wanted to free itself, if it made the smallest movement, the whole building would collapse...’ (ibid., p.217). Nerval represents a fascinating constellation of Benjamin’s interests. In Nerval’s esoteric Romanticism, Benjamin remarks, ‘Novalis would probably have found his poetic ideal more fully embodied than in almost any other work’ (Walter Benjamin, ‘Review of Renéville’s *Expérience poétique*’, *SW4* p.117); Benjamin also mentions him alongside E. T. A. Hoffman and De Quincey in his list of ‘Romantic storytellers’ in ‘Eduard Fuchs (*EF* 275). Of Nerval’s 1828 translation of *Faust*, at age of twenty, Goethe was said to remarked that ‘although he could no longer bear to read his tragedy in German, this new French version had managed to restore the work to him in all its original youthfulness and vigour...’ (Richard Seiburth, ‘Introduction’, *Gérard de Nerval: Selected Writings*, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Penguin, 1999), p.xiii). Nerval is a central figure in the nineteenth century French literature: ‘Charles Baudelaire observed that he was one of the few authors of his age who had successfully managed, even in death, to remain “forever lucid”. Marcel Proust ranks him as among the three or four greatest writers of the nineteenth century’ (ibid., p.vii). Andre Breton also declared him a precursor of Surrealism, and the name for this movement itself derives from Guillaume Apollinaire’s shortening of Nerval’s neologism “supernaturaliste”, which first appeared in his translation of *Faust* and was adopted by Nerval (as well as Nerval’s friend Baudelaire) to describe the dream states in which he composed his poetry (ibid., pp.vii & 181).

100 Andrew Benjamin, ‘Time and Task: Benjamin and Heidegger showing the present’, op. cit., p.32.

(ibid.). Whereas the influence of the personal unconscious, as those contents which in Freudian terms ‘are capable of becoming conscious and often do, but are the suppressed’, appear in the work as symptoms, the symbolic signifies the contents of the collective unconscious, which show ‘no tendency to become conscious under normal conditions’ and cannot be ‘brought back to recollection by any analytical technique, since it was never repressed or forgotten’ (*RAPP* 80).

Where Jung’s description evokes the speculative experience of a transcendental realm, one which cannot be expressed directly in the consciousness but does appear in symbolic form in the mediated realm of art, it is coherent with the interpretation of Benjamin’s transcendental empiricism presented in the preceding chapters and expounded here as an expressive materialism. But Jung quickly goes on to hypostatize this transcendental realm in biological terms, as ‘inborn possibilities of ideas...inherited in the anatomical structure of the brain’, and with a ‘primitive original’ [*primitive Vorlage*] preserved in ‘the psychic residua of innumerable experiences of the same type’ (*RAPP* 81-1). As a consequence of this shift, the effects of Jung’s collective unconscious uncomfortably appear as an apologia in advance for German fascism.<sup>101</sup>

This effect is achieved in great art, Jung argues, through ‘the unconscious activation of an archetypal image, and in elaborating and shaping [*Entwicklung und Ausgestaltung*] this image into the finished work. By giving it shape, the artist translates it into the language of the present [*eine Übersetzung in die Sprache der Gegenwart*], and so makes it possible for us to find out way back to the deepest springs of life’ (*RAPP* 77). The ‘social significance of art’ is therefore defined as ‘conjuring up the forms in which the age is most lacking...compensat[ing] the inadequacy and one-sidedness of the present’ (*RAPP* 82). In Convolute N of the *Arcades Project* Benjamin ridicules this description for reducing the ‘esoteric theory of art’ to the function of ‘making archetypes “accessible” to the “Zeitgeist”’ (*AP* N8, 2). It is not the archetypes or primal images that Benjamin ironizes here, but their conjunction with a notion of “accessibility” which reduces translation to conjuration and the ‘language of the present’ to a “Zeitgeist”. It is this understanding of conjunction or actualization of the archetype which renders Jung’s primal image an undialectical and therefore archaic one, and which – according to Benjamin’s criticism of historical materialism considered above – turns the crudely materialist element of Jung’s theory of ideas into a reactionary idealism.

---

101 ‘[W]hoever speaks in the primordial images speaks with a thousand voices; he enthrals and overpowers, while at the same time he lifts the idea he is seeking to express out of the occasional and the transitory into the realm the ever-enduring’; this archetypal situation is felt as being ‘caught up by an overwhelming power’ in which ‘we are no longer individuals, but the race’; the stirring ideal of the “fatherland” derives from ‘the symbolical value of our native land’, which activates the archetype of ‘the *participation mystique* of primitive man with the soil on which he dwells, and which contains the spirits of his ancestors’ (*RAPP* 82).

Of central importance to Jung's concept of the symbol is the significance of Faust's descent to the Mothers as the realm of primal images. Jung certainly grasped the dialectical aspect of Faust's descent, understanding this constellation as a confirmation of his own theory of the libido as at once both erotically life-enhancing and destructively catastrophic. Hence, the chthonic descent to the realm of the Mothers must be properly situated within the context of its dialectical antipode in Faust's vital pursuit of the feminine ideal of Helen, the classical archetype of beauty.<sup>102</sup> But Jung misunderstands the significance of this scene and of the conjuration or translation into the present that it enacts. Whilst Faust follows Mephistopheles instructions to 'conjure [Helen and Paris] up' by descending to the Mothers, where 'hover images of all that's been created', and bringing back the tripod which summons them forth, he clumsily intervenes upon the phantom scene and, crying '[t]his is reality...[s]he was so far away, but now could not be nearer', causes the figures to dissolve in his attempt to rescue Helen from Paris.<sup>103</sup> Scholars have pointed to the phantasmagoric reference of this conjuration, arguing that the image of Helen is a metatheatrical act of conjuration: the product of a literal phantasmagoria show. Goethe was not only familiar with Etienne-Gaspard Robertson's Parisian "Phantasmagoria" when he came to write the second part of Faust, but, according to Albrecht Schöne, the whole 'dumb-show of Paris and Helen' represents 'an illusionist spectacle devised by Mephistopheles with the help of a magic lantern that projects images onto a screen or smoke (or incense)'.<sup>104</sup> As Mephistopheles directs the

---

102 Helen is first referred to in the "Witch's Kitchen" scene of Faust I, when Faust sees 'a form whose beauty is divine...A picture of a woman of surpassing beauty...the essence of all paradises' in the magic mirror, a form which Mephistopheles refers to at the close of the scene as 'the paragon of womankind...Helen of Troy'. (J. W. von Goethe, 'Faust I', *CW2* lines 2430-2440 & 2601-2603). It is only much later however, in the second part of the play, that Faust attempts to actualise Helen – as the essence of beauty – in some kind of particular or phenomenal form. He does so under the instruction of the Emperor, who 'wants to see...Helen of Troy and Paris here before him, and gaze upon clear counterfeits of those two paragons of male and female beauty' (J. W. von Goethe, 'Faust II', *CW2* lines 6183-6).

103 J. W. von Goethe, 'Faust II', *CW2* lines 6553-6563.

104 Albrecht Schöne specially emphasises its technical aspect in his Frankfurter Ausgabe 1994 edition of Faust, a theme taken up in Neil Flax's discussion (cf. Neil Flax, 'Goethe's Faust II and the Experimental Theatre of His Time', *Comparative Literature*, 31, 2, (Spring, 1979), pp.154-166). 'The "Phantasmagoria" is discussed in an article on Robertson in a German scientific journal in 1804, an article which Goethe demonstrably read, since he discusses it in detail in his *Farbenlehre*. But beyond this one direct reference, it is hard to imagine, given the fame of Robertson's theatre at the time, that Goethe could have been unaware of it' (ibid., p.157). Stuart Atkins was one of the first modern critics to see 'the whole construct of the Mothers, its attendant motifs, and the subsequent development of the action in the Rittersaal scene' as 'a "brilliant improvisation" on the part of Mephistopheles' (cf. Stuart Atkins, *Goethe's Faust: A Literary Analysis*, (Cambridge, MA., Harvard University Press, 1958), pp.133-4); also John R. Williams, 'The Problem of the Mothers', *A Companion to Goethe's Faust: Parts I and II*, ed. Paul Bishop, (Rochester, NY & Woodbridge, Suffolk, Camden House, 2001), p.132). Marina Warner also draws upon Goethe's fascination with the phantasmagoria, noting how in a letter he describes an 'artistic illusion...conjured with a kind of *Lanterna Magica*' and adds 'Could you please find out, as soon as possible, who constructs



performance from the prompter's box, from where the remarked artificiality of the spectres are projected onto the 'smoke-like haze' which engulfs the stage within the stage, he is required to repeatedly remind Faust that 'you're the author of this spectral masque!'.<sup>105</sup> For Schöne, Goethe's use of the phantasmagoria echoes the motif of the 'artificial, false semblance-like, [and] fictitious' that runs through the whole of the first act.<sup>106</sup>

Despite the implicit theatricality and artificiality of this scene, Jung clearly attaches some importance to the conjuration of Paris and Helen through Faust's descent to the archetypal realm of the Mothers, a mistake which indicates his tendency to conflate the origin of primal images with some primitive historical realm of the unconscious. Jung argues that out of the 'regressive movement of libido towards the primordial, a diving down into the source of the first beginnings...there rises, as an image of the incipient progressive movement': hence, he adds, 'Goethe makes the divine images of Paris and Helena float up from the tripod of the Mothers...'.<sup>107</sup> It is for this reason that Jung associates Helen with 'the symbol, which is a condensation of all the operative unconscious factors – "living form", as Schiller says', and the 'rejuvenated pair' as 'the symbol of a process of inner union, which is precisely what Faust passionately craves for himself as the supreme inner atonement'.<sup>108</sup> 'The raw material shaped by thesis and antithesis, and in the shaping of which the opposites are united, is the living symbol,' Jung claims, and its 'profundity of meaning is inherent in the raw material itself, the very

---

such an apparatus, how could WE obtain it, and what preparations must be made for it?'. Goethe's drawings suggest that the 'vision of Helen of Troy should also be patterned on optical illusions, with two-way mirrors and changing lighting bringing her image suddenly into focus in the glass' (Marina Warner, *Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors, and Media in the Twenty-First Century*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006), p.154).

105 J. W. von Goethe, 'Faust II', *CW2* lines 6546; cf. Neil M. Flax, "Goethe's *Faust II* and the Experimental Theatre of his Time", op. cit.

106 "[D]as Grundmotiv des Künstlichen, trügerisch Scheinhaften, Fiktiven, das diesen ganzen 1. Akt durchzieht" (Albrecht Schöne, *Faust: Kommentare*, (Frankfurt am Main, Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1994), p.465, quoted in John R. Williams, op. cit., p.132). This parallels the promissory illusion of paper money introduced by Mephistopheles to stave off the financial ruin of the Empire.

107 C. G. Jung, 'Psychological Types' (1921), *CW6* p.125.

108 Ibid. Jung develops this concept of the symbol through an interpretation of Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* in particular, and in agreement with Goethe's account of symbolism in general. Hence, Jung agrees that the 'mediating position' in the conflict between rational judgement and sensuous desire – the problem which concerns Schiller in the *Aesthetic Education* – 'can be reached only by the symbols' (ibid., p.111). But for Jung, the site where 'all psychic functions are indistinguishably merged in the original and fundamental activity of the psyche' is not the imagination, but the 'fantastical activity' of the unconscious. If the ideal of Helen in the Imperial Palace is an archetypal image for Jung, she corresponds to his doctrine of the psychological symbol as a Schillerian "living form", which represents 'something that is not wholly understandable...[and] hints intuitively at its possible meaning' (ibid., p.105).

stuff of the psyche, transcending time and dissolution...'.<sup>109</sup> This process of shaping is reminiscent of Jung's Schillerian description of the 'social significance of art' in 'On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry' (*RAPP* 77).

The problem that Jung overlooks in his appropriation of Faust's supposed descent to the Mothers and the act of conjuration that archetypal extroversion entails is that this image of Helen is produced not directly and magically through the profundity of psychological symbolisation, but is mediated via the technological reproduction and projection of the magic lantern and the other technical apparatus of the phantasmagoria show.<sup>110</sup> Although the magic produced by the tripod Faust retrieves from the Mothers has been variously associated with necromantic ritual, artistic genius and female procreation, this interpretation suggests its necessity is related to its literal projection of the phantastical theatrical slide show that follows.<sup>111</sup> This form of presencing is therefore phantasmagorical in the sense of superficial and magical, serving to distract and entertain, to compensate for nothing nobler than the boredom of the age rather than generating any critical potential. It leaves the ontological conditions of the present untouched, and conjures up the past as an artificially flattened and rigid semblance of the living present.

Faust's schizophrenic introversion to the realm of the Mothers and projection of Helen and Paris as the ideals of beauty is provoked by the crisis of signification, which follows from Mephistopheles' introduction of paper money based on the illusory promise of buried gold and which induces a carnivalesque interchangeability of signs.<sup>112</sup> Marx's

---

109 Ibid., p.480

110 Jung repeats Faust's own misrecognition, for whereas the audience express a disappointment with Goethe's phantasmagorical images ('He might be a bit less stiff', 'Although I see her clearly, I'll point out that there may be some doubt if she's authentic'), Mephistopheles is continually forced to interject when Faust takes them for reality ('Control yourself, and don't forget your part', 'Don't interfere in what the phantom's doing', 'But you're the author of this spectral masque!') (Goethe, 'Faust II', *CW2* lines 6458-6546).

111 Ursula Reidel-Schrewe argues that 'the key and the tripod are presented as ritual objects complementing each other and symbolizing the ultimate power of genius' (Ursula Reidel-Schrewe, 'Key and tripod in Mikhail Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*', *Neophilologus*, 79, 2, (April, 1995), p.273). John Aloysius McCarthy, however, rejects this classical association and focuses, in rather excited detail, on its sexual imagery: 'Traditionally, the burning tripod is interpreted to be the common feature in ancient sanctuaries, suggestive of oracular and spirit-summoning powers. We can see it, however, as related to the fundamental significance for Goethe of flame and light as symbolic of divine and life-giving qualities. Given the clearly phallic symbolism of the key that naturally seeks out the "right place," the argument for viewing the burning tripod as the aroused female genitals is more compelling. The triangular form of the tripod supporting the flaming bowl is reminiscent of the triangular shape of the gateway to the female reproductive organs' (John Aloysius McCarthy, *Remapping Reality: Chaos and Creativity in Science and Literature*, (Amsterdam & New York, Rodopi, 2006), p.210).

112 'Money's symbolic excess slips into Marx's delineation of money's powers. It is not only able to maintain its value while losing its substance. It can transform those who possess it...Marx cites Goethe's *Faust*: "money is now pregnant," or money has love in its belly: "*Geld hat Lieb im Leib*". Money begets money, so it would seem, when it turns into interest-bearing capital' (Esther Leslie, *Synthetic Worlds: Nature, Art and the Chemical Industry*,

reflections on the ‘inverting power’ of money in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* evokes the sorcery associated with this sudden transformation and confusion. There he describes the capacity of money to ‘to turn *imagination into reality* and *reality into mere imagination*’ and ‘*real human and natural powers into...imperfections* and tormenting phantoms, just as it turns *real imperfections and phantoms...into real essential powers and abilities*’.<sup>113</sup> But the symbolic capacity of money is not restricted merely to turning unreal desire into real existence, and therefore ideologically inverting the foundational relationship between the ideal and the real. Money also has a ‘symbolic excess’, Esther Leslie suggests, which transforms and transfigures the human personality, whilst assuming an excessive procreative fecundity of its own.<sup>114</sup> It also has the capacity to transform the structure of the real and therefore of the ideal, no longer simply reflecting reality but, as Jung emphasised, of actively producing and transforming it.

In the discussion of Goethe’s quasi-materialism in Chapter 2, the specific photographic ontology of what was referred to as the *ikon* or theological image was introduced in order to explain the material continuity between the signifier and the signified. A mistaken concept of the symbol occludes this relationship, reinforcing the division between the ideal and the real even as it inverts their relationship. In the metamorphic development from the camera obscura to the Lumière cinematographe this inversion is merely deepened: now the apparently moving, seemingly singular image projected into the darkened space of the theatre is more real than the reality itself.<sup>115</sup> But

---

Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Reaktion, 2005), p.91)

113 “‘What, man! confound it, hands and feet/ And head and backside, all are yours!/ And what we take while life is sweet,/ Is that to be declared not ours?/ Six stallions, say, I can afford,/ Is not their strength my property?/ I tear along, a sporting lord, As if their legs belonged to me” (Goethe, *Faust* – Mephistopheles)...let us begin, first of all, by expounding the passage from Goethe...Through money I can have anything that the human heart desires. Do not I therefore possess all human abilities? Does not my money therefore transform all my incapacities into their contrary? If money is the bond which ties me to human life and society, which links me to nature and to man, is money not the bond of all bonds? Can it not bind and loose all bonds? Is it therefore not the universal means of separation? It is the true agent of separation and the true cementing power, it is the chemical power of society’ (Karl Marx, ‘Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts’, op. cit., pp.376-7).

114 “‘What, man! confound it, hands and feet/ And head and backside, all are yours!/ And what we take while life is sweet,/ Is that to be declared not ours?/ Six stallions, say, I can afford,/ Is not their strength my property?/ I tear along, a sporting lord, As if their legs belonged to me” (Goethe, *Faust* – Mephistopheles)...let us begin, first of all, by expounding the passage from Goethe...Through money I can have anything that the human heart desires. Do not I therefore possess all human abilities? Does not my money therefore transform all my incapacities into their contrary? If money is the bond which ties me to human life and society, which links me to nature and to man, is money not the bond of all bonds? Can it not bind and loose all bonds? Is it therefore not the universal means of separation? It is the true agent of separation and the true cementing power, it is the chemical power of society’ (Karl Marx, ‘Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts’, op. cit., pp.376-7).

115 Of the Lumière film *L’Arrivée d’un Train* (1895), Maxim Gorky writes: ‘It darts like an arrow

reality is left untroubled by the semblance of the real in this spectacle; if anything, the objective experience of space and time attributed to the detached observer is reinforced, and the truth of the construction of this moving image out of the juxtaposition of multiple static frames is suppressed. So, the ideological function at work in money in general and capital in particular is not merely, as the young Marx supposes, the repression of the difference between ‘a representation which merely *exists* within me and one which exists outside me as a *real object*’ – that is, between “thinking” and “being” or ‘effective demand based on money and ineffective demand based on my need’ – but of the reality of the underlying independence and autonomy which effectively cancels the absolute separation of being and thinking in Marx’s description.<sup>116</sup>

#### 4.5 ‘Pale and Fleeting Clearings in History’: Dialectical Image, Phantasmagorical Presencing

Margaret Cohen argues that, ‘[t]ransforming the 1935 opposition between dream image and dialectical image into the difference between mystifying and (critically) illuminating phantasmagorias, Benjamin suggests the last phantasmagoria [Auguste Blanqui’s *Eternité par les Astres*] as the form by which phantasmagorical delusion may be undone’.<sup>117</sup> This dialectical role for the concept of phantasmagoria entails a fore-grounding of its technological manifestation through magic lantern shows, aspects ‘not found in the term’s usage in 1935’, Cohen argues, but which permits Benjamin to correct Marx’s falsely mimetic representation.<sup>118</sup> Such phantasmagorical performances were enacted in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Europe, relying upon a sophisticated deployment of the older magic lantern device, which projected the images from painted slides (although later using advances in photographic technology to project the performance of real, hidden actors) onto a secretly deployed gauze screen or literal smoke screen. The spectral effect was enhanced through technological and theatrical means.<sup>119</sup>

---

straight towards you – watch out! It seems as though it is about to rush into the darkness where you are sitting and reduce you to a mangled sack of skin, full of crumpled flesh and splintering bones, and destroy this hall and this building, so full of wine, women, music and vice, and transform it into fragments and into dust. But this, too, is merely a train of shadows’ (Maxim Gorky, ‘The Lumière Cinematographe’, *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939*, eds. Richard Taylor & Ian Christie, (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988), p.26.

116 Karl Marx, ‘Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts’, op. cit., p.378.

117 Margaret Cohen, *Profane Illumination*, op. cit., p.231.

118 Margaret Cohen, ‘Walter Benjamin’s Phantasmagoria’, *New German Critique*, 48, (Autumn, 1989), pp.87 & 93.

119 Such as twin projection, the shortening and enlargement of the image through the movement of the projector, the suggestion of movement through rapid juxtaposition of images, and the use of music and sound effects, stage setting, planted stooges, and atmospheric suggestion.

Whilst the use of Jung's theory of the symbolic activity of the unconscious permits a psychological way of thinking Benjamin's replacement of the camera obscura's simulacra of realism with the phantasmagoria show's material projection, the critique of Jung's concept of the symbol is required for a consideration of the specific temporality of such "spectral" projection. Projection, in both its technological and psychological sense [*Projektion*], suggests a displacement from inside to outside, an act of throwing or leaping forward, which also implies a temporal aspect, and it is this aspect that harbours a more radical potential for illuminating the ideological semblance of capitalist history. The relationship previously established between the conjuration of the past and the present into which it is conjured must be reformulated if Benjamin's more critical form of "presencing" is to be clarified and the dialectical image rescued. What Benjamin means here might be introduced by considering the success he associates with the literary technique of "making present" [*Vergegenwärtigung*] in the works of the French novelist Julien Green. In a review of Green's work from 1930, Benjamin distinguishes this "making present" from the depiction practiced by Naturalism by referring to its 'magical side' as well as its 'temporal aspect'.<sup>120</sup> Making present involves an act of conjuration, a bringing into presence of that which is absent, achieved through the specific character of its temporal index: by imagining people and the conditions of their existence 'in a way that they would never have appeared to a contemporary', Green represents a 'second present' which 'immortalizes what exists'. This effect is in part achieved through Green's stylized use of the simple past tense [*passé simple*], an outmoded literary form which refers to the past action as something finished and completed.<sup>121</sup> The characters conjured in this way appear as if 'apparitions...compelled to relieve these moments anew', and it is this very temporal representation, Benjamin argues, which renders it a 'magical act'.<sup>122</sup>

But Benjamin also approves of how Green's 'visionary aura' remains distanced from that of dreams by retaining the authentic seal of the here and now of the present ('the here and now is the seal of authenticity that clings to every vision').<sup>123</sup> As a result of this double aspect of presencing, Green's characters and the conditions of their existence 'stand in the twofold darkness of what has only just happened and the unthinkable remote past', housed within a 'temporal space, which is alien to them and which encloses them in a vault of hollow years that echoes back their whispered words and screams...'.<sup>124</sup> Thus Green's *Mont-Cinère* reveals 'a meteorological compromise between a climate of primal

---

120 Walter Benjamin, 'Julien Green', *SW2* p.333.

121 Cf. Annie Brudo, *Rêve et fantastique chez Julien Green*, (Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1995), p.237; Entry on 'Julien Green', *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, accessed 17/09/09, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/244888/Julien-Green>.

122 Walter Benjamin, 'Julien Green', *SW2* p.333.

123 Ibid., p.334.

124 Ibid., pp.335 & 333.

history and that of the present day', just as the landscape of *Adrienne Mesurat* 'appears timeless, from the elemental forces at work in its characters to the no less primeval nature of their world...'.<sup>125</sup> Benjamin describes this as the 'primal history of the nineteenth century', a glimpse of 'pale and fleeting clearings in history' which occurs 'only as the result of catastrophe'.<sup>126</sup> This primordial anamnesis anticipates his later description of the *mémoire involontaire*, whose images are those 'we have never seen before we remember them': 'This is most clearly the case in those images in which – like in some dreams – we see ourselves. We stand in front of ourselves, the way we might have stood somewhere in a prehistoric past, but never before our waking gaze'.<sup>127</sup> In what might be understood as the primal history of his own theories of Ideas, he goes on to unfold these primal images from a psycho-philosophical context to the techno-theological one of the photographic and then cinematographic image:

Yet these images, developed in the darkroom of the lived moment, are the most important we will ever see. One might say that our most profound moments have been equipped – like those cigarette packs – with a little image, a photograph of ourselves. And that "whole life" which, as they say, passes through people's minds when they are dying or in mortal danger is composed of such little images. They flash by in as rapid a sequence as the booklets of our childhood, precursors of cinema, in which we admired a boxer, a swimmer or a tennis player.

If the literary techniques of Green's novels provide Benjamin with a model for his practice of historical montage in the *Arcades Project*, it is clear from his reviews that they do so by already fulfilling the demands which Adorno later imposes upon Benjamin's concept of "primal history". What also becomes apparent from Benjamin's discussion is the extent to which the reworking of the past necessarily implies a reworking of the present. It is, however, the present which becomes spectral or ghostly in this diachronic conjunction, and the past which, in contrast, endures as substantial, earthly, and chthonic. The emphasis placed upon repetition by Benjamin here therefore falls not so much upon the past as upon the historically actual present which appears as a "second present" through being magically conjured somewhere else in Green's work. When Benjamin criticises Jung in the *Arcades Project* for wanting to 'distance awakening from dream' (a charge he also directs at Aragon and the Surrealists), this should be contrasted with the dialectical rhythm of Green's 'phased submerging and awakening'.<sup>128</sup>

---

125 Walter Benjamin, 'The Fireside Saga' (1928), *SW2* p.151; Walter Benjamin, 'Review of Green's *Adrienne Mesurat*' (1928), *SW2* p.160.

126 Walter Benjamin, 'The Fireside Saga', *SW2* pp.151-2.

127 Walter Benjamin, 'A Short Speech on Proust' (1932), quoted in Miriam Hansen, 'Benjamin, Cinema and Experience: "The Blue Flower in the Land of Technology"', *Walter Benjamin: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory*, ed. Peter Osborne, (London & New York, Routledge, 2005), Volume 2, p.253.

128 *AP* N18, 4; '...whereas Aragon persists within the realm of dream, here the concern is to find

Benjamin's rejection of the Jungian "presencing" of primal images, and their consequently archaic and undialectical form, may be represented in terms of a critique of Jung's reading of the signification operating in Goethe's *Faust II*. Whilst Jung takes the "neo-classical" conjuration of the ideal of beauty at face value, a broader, Benjaminian consideration of this scene suggests Goethe offers it as a baroque self-critique of the classicism of *Faust I*. As part of this critique, the action of the play also subtly subverts Goethe's own theoretical reflections on the symbolic and the allegorical. The subsequent two Acts of Goethe's play dramatise Faust's further quest to recover Helen, searching for her in the mythical pageant of the Classical Walpurgisnight and, with Mephistopheles's help, being reunited with her in the baroque setting of the castle of Mistra, near Sparta.<sup>129</sup> Here, Goethe dramatises an alternative form of Hellenic/Hellenic presencing, which subverts the neo-classical tropes of the play and undermines the classical concept of the symbol discussed above.

As John Williams makes clear, the 'a spectral image of the Greek heroine, inaccessible to Faust except as a phantom form' is 'not remotely the Helen of Act 3', who is historically actualised and physically embodied, capable of moving and interacting with the other characters, to the extent that she is capable of producing an offspring through her union with Faust.<sup>130</sup> Williams argues that this difference is the result of Faust's 'experience, vicariously and at first hand, [of] the whole primitive pre-classical spectrum of archaic Greek religious myth, the pre-history of Helen herself, as it were...'.<sup>131</sup> Whilst this might imply that Goethe sought to contrast the merely phantasmagorical first act with the "authentic" reality of Helen in Act 3, it is the latter scene which Goethe entitles "Helen: Classico-Romantic Phantasmagoria".<sup>132</sup> Writing to Wilhelm von Humboldt after the completion of Act 3 in 1826, it is the striking temporality of the scene that Goethe singles out: it 'embraces 3,000 years, from the collapse of Troy to the capture of Missolonghi', he says, which 'can be considered an age in the highest sense of the word; the unity of place and action are, however, most punctiliously observed in the usual way'.<sup>133</sup> In another letter, Goethe cites this as the 'most remarkable thing' about a play he already describes as 'as strange and problematic

---

the constellation of awakening...that, of course, can only happen through the awakening of a non-yet-conscious knowledge of what has been' (*AP* <H<sup>o</sup>, 17>); Walter Benjamin, 'Julien Green', *SW2* p.33.

129 Paul Bishop follows the critics in identifying the location of the Helen scene in 'Mistra, a fortress city not far from Sparta' (Paul Bishop, 'Introduction: Reading Faust Today', *A Companion to Goethe's Faust Parts I and II*, (Rochester, NY & Woodbridge, Suffolk, Camden House, 2001), p.xvii).

130 John R. Williams, op. cit., p.140.

131 Ibid., p.141.

132 Siegfried Unseld, *Goethe and His Publishers*, trans. Kenneth J. Northcott, (Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press, 1996), p.325.

133 Ibid.

a piece as I have ever written', for 'without changing its locus it covers exactly three thousand years, it observes meticulously the unity of action and place, but allows the third (time) to pass as in a phantasmagoria'.<sup>134</sup>

It is this phantasmagoric temporality of Act 3, Anthony Phelan argues, which renders the position of Helen deeply ambiguous, for 'the return of some element of antiquity from the past and its reinstatement in the present...gives new meaning to the term representation, which is now a restoration to presence', but one which 'destabilizes the personal identity of its central figure by insisting on her allusive character'.<sup>135</sup> This phantasmagoric "presencing" of Act 3 provides a more radical and dialectical concept of the phantasmagorical semblance which can be seen operating in Benjamin's *Arcades Project*. The difference between the two Helen scenes in Act 1 and Act 3 concerns the temporality of their presences, not any essentialism concerning their ontological status. Neither of the Helen figures is fully "authentic", but the varying forms of their temporal presences does grant them a different existential status. The second Helen is granted embodiment through the performance of her pre-history, the staged return to her Hellenic past-present, her flight into the future of Faust's mediaeval past-present, and the anticipation of Goethe's future-present. All this occurs *internal* to the momentary present in which the two phantasmagorical acts are encompassed: it splits open the continuity between the end of Act 1 and the beginning of Act 4.

Critics typically refer to this phantasmagorical temporality as "symbolic", disregarding Benjamin's critique of the Romantic misunderstanding of the symbol and the emergence of an allegorical sensibility within Goethe's mature writings.<sup>136</sup> Both Goethe and Jung's theoretical definitions of the symbol share this devaluation of the allegorical.<sup>137</sup> But despite Goethe and Jung's own theories of allegory, the

---

134 Ibid., p.324.

135 Anthony Phelan, 'The Classical and the Medieval in *Faust II*', *A Companion to Goethe's Faust Parts I and II*, op. cit., p.162.

136 Although J. Lamport observes how 'at the centre of the whole work, in the loftiest and in some ways most significant episode of the triple tragedy, time is turned inside out', he refers to this as an 'appropriately symbolic...time-scale' (F. J. Lamport, 'Synchrony and Diachrony in Faust', *Oxford German Studies*, 15, (1984), pp.125-126). Similarly, Neil Flax argues that there is a 'revelatory quality in Faust's encounter with Helena' which demonstrates that 'symbols do work', although he adds that the 'effect of the manifestation is merely to reassert the impossibility of the transcendence that was promised by the antecedent symbols' (Neil Flax, 'The Presence of the Sign in Goethe's Faust', *PMLA*, 98, 2, (March, 1983), p.195). For Flax this confirms the proper paradoxical structure of the Romantic symbol, which by revealing itself as a sign and declaring its fictitiousness thereby affirms the primacy and verity of the semiotic condition'; a truth Flax associates with "literary absolute" of early German Romanticism, as well as holding affinities with aspects of deconstruction (ibid., pp.192 & 200, n.15).

137 As Paul Bishop points out, Jung's understanding of the 'essence of the symbol' as 'represent[ing] in itself something that is not wholly understandable, and hint[ing] only intuitively at its possible meaning', is reminiscent of Goethe's definition: 'Symbolism



phantasmagorical temporality of *Faust II* suggests that Goethe may have been more attentive to the nuances of the allegorical than his own polemical position allows for. As Neil Flax points out, the relation between Goethe's theory of symbol and allegory and his theatrical practice should not be presumed to be unproblematically identical and Mary Desaulniers, noting how Goethe 'doubles the apparent significations' of his signs, writes that in *Faust II* 'the allegory resists being a mere allegory and achieves the manifold, obscure, and irreconcilable "phantasmagory" of Coleridge's symbol'.<sup>138</sup>

Benjamin explains the different temporal signification of the Idea in symbol and allegory by developing Creuzer's suggestion, that '[t]he distinction between the two modes is therefore to be sought in the momentariness which allegory lacks' (*OGT* 165). In the symbol 'we have momentary totality', in the allegory 'progression in a series of moments'. In his discussion of Jung's schizophrenic transformation of reality into the 'world as a symbol', Christian Kerslake points out how for Schelling 'symbols functioned in a different way to allegorical images or scenes – which required knowledge of an actual esoteric "key" which relates the elements to a historical or mythical narrative', concluding that the 'power of religious and mythical images did not come from their allegorical function'.<sup>139</sup> But because Schelling misconstrued the concept of allegory in contrast to the promise held out by the symbol, he failed to grasp what Creuzer and Görres, who perceived the important temporality of allegory, saw: 'it is allegory, and not the symbol, which embraces myth..., the essence of which is most adequately expressed in the progression of the epic poem'.<sup>140</sup> Whilst Jung read Görres in his youth and Creuzer in preparation for *Transformation and Symbols of the Libido*, he appears not to have heeded their reservations: they 'have no use for the view that the symbol is being, and

---

transforms the phenomenon into an idea, the idea into an image [*die Erscheinung in Idee, die Idee in ein Bild*], and does it in such a way that the idea-in-the-image [*Idee im Bild*] remains infinitely effective and unattainable – and though it may be expressed in every language, it will remain inexpressible [*unaussprechlich*]' (C. G. Jung, 'Psychological Types', *CW* 6 p.480; *MR* #1113, trans. Paul Bishop, *Analytical Psychology and German Classical Aesthetics: Goethe, Schiller and Jung*, op. cit., p.135). For both, allegory merely designates the relation between a concept and a phenomenon, so that according to Goethe 'the concept continues to remain circumscribed and completely available and expressible within the image' (*MR* #1112). Similarly, when Jung argues that Freud's concept of the dream symbol is flawed because it has 'merely the role of signs and symptoms of the subliminal process', he is invoking a definition of the symbol in contrast to a devalued concept of allegory as the conventional sign (*RAPP* 70; quoted in Christian Kerslake, *Deleuze and the Unconscious*, op. cit., p.106). 'Symbols are not allegories and not signs', Jung argues, because the 'sign always has a fixed meaning, because it is a conventional abbreviation for, or a commonly accepted indication of, something known' (*TSL* 124).

138 Neil Flax, 'The Presence of the Sign in Goethe's *Faust*', op. cit., p.184; Mary Desaulniers, *Carlyle and the Economics of Terror: A Study of Revisionary Gothicism in the French Revolution*, (Montreal, Quebec & Kingston, Ontario, McGill-Queens University Press, 1995), p.46.

139 Christian Kerslake, *Deleuze and the Unconscious*, op. cit., p.108.

140 Friedrich Creuzer, *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker, besonders der Griechen*, 1. Theil. 2., (Leipzig, Darmstadt, völlig umgearb Ausgabe, 1819), pp.70-1; quoted in *OGT* 165.

allegory is sign... We can be perfectly satisfied with the explanation that takes the one as a sign for ideas, which is self-contained, concentrated, and which steadfastly remains itself, while recognising the other as a successively progressing, dramatically mobile, dynamic representation of ideas which has acquired the very fluidity of time'.<sup>141</sup>

The phantasmagorical presencing of Helen in Act 3 is staged as a primal history of her semblance, revealed in the baroque juxtaposition of her classical past and Faust's modern present, which provides an ironic critique of Faust's own conjuration in Act 1. Goethe's use of the term "phantasmagoria" to describe the "presencing" of Helen in this scene makes it evident that he grasps the concept as more than either the making real of an illusion or the illusion of a reality, but as being implicated in the revelation of the dialectical truth of semblance. Benjamin's original subtitle for his work on the Paris arcades was 'a dialectical fairy tale [*féerie*]', and in Convolute Y of the *Arcades Project* this form is exemplified by 'bevy of naked beauties' illustrating English industry in *Parisiens a Londres* (1866) – 'who naturally owe their appearance to allegory and poetic invention' – and as with 'the most fantastic creations of fairyland [*la féerie*]...wonders as great as those produced by Doctor Faustus with his book of magic' are turned out each day by the industrial factories of London and Paris.<sup>142</sup>

Margaret Cohen explains how this term was adopted in '1823 Paris to designate a theatrical spectacle "where supernatural characters appear... and which requires considerable theatrical means," notably mechanical ones...', and how it is this meaning which, invested with critical resonance, leads Benjamin to develop his own technological model for the phantasmagoria.<sup>143</sup> It is in this sense that the pioneering film-maker George Méliès describes his first sketches as a '*genre féérique et fantasmagorique*', inspired by his earlier stage performances involving 'magic lantern shows where the *féerie* met the phantasmagoria'.<sup>144</sup> Méliès's films, characterised as the antithesis of Lumière's realist

---

141 C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, ed. Aniela Jaffe, (New York, Fontana Press, 1995), pp.120-186; Johann Joseph von Görres, quoted in Friedrich Creuzer, *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker*, op. cit., pp.147-8 & OGT 165.

142 Cf. 'Fairy plays [*Feenstücke*]: "Thus, for example, in *Parisiens a Londres* (1866), the English industrial exhibition is brought to the stage and illustrated by a bevy of naked beauties, who naturally owe their appearance to allegory and poetic invention alone" Rudolf Gottschall, "Das Theatre und Drama des Second Empire", *Unsere Zeit: Deutsche Revue – Montasschrift zum Konversationslexikon*, (Leipzig, 1867), p.932 [Advertising] (*AP* Y1a,1); "The most fantastic creations of fairyland are near to being realized before our very eyes...Each day our factories turn out wonders as great as those produced by Doctor Faustus with his book of magic" Eugene Buret, *De la Misere des classes laborieuses en France et en Angleterre* (Paris, 1840), vol. 2, pp.161-2' (*AP* Y2,1).

143 Walter Benjamin, *Briefe*, eds. Gershom Scholem & Theodor W. Adorno, (Frankfurt am Maine, Suhrkamp, 1978), Volume 1, p.455, trans. Margaret Cohen, *Profane Illumination*, op. cit., pp.253-4.

144 Margaret Cohen, *Profane Illumination*, op cit., pp.253-4. Ezra Elizabeth notes how Méliès' 'féeries or fantasy films have helped classify him as the pioneer of early cinema' (Ezra Elizabeth, *Georges Méliès: The Birth of the Auteur*, (Manchester, Manchester University

tendency in Siegfried Kraucauer's *Theory of Film*, 'explored new frontiers within fantasy fiction, trick film, and elaborate mise-en-scène', leading him to be nicknamed the "magician of Montreuil".<sup>145</sup> Méliès's short film *The Magic Lantern* (1903), for example, uses multiple exposure to create the metatheatrical illusion of a giant magic lantern projector, out of which are then conjured – through stop-editing – a chorus of dancing girls.<sup>146</sup> Whereas Lumière refused to sell Méliès a camera for his theatre, on the basis that film offered nothing more than a "scientific curiosity", the latter exploited the capacity for the fantastical opened up through the technical specificities of cinematography.<sup>147</sup> Méliès, perhaps more than anyone, grasped the metatheatrical themes of conjuration present in Goethe's version of the legend, and he produced four films in the space of 8 years which are taken from the Faust legend.<sup>148</sup> It is in this context that Goethe's phantasmagoria may be considered the *Urform* of modern cinema itself: the play dramatizes its own temporality in a procession of images conjured as a carnival of the allegorical, and prophesizes its own demise as a performance whose technical demands anticipate its true realization only in film.

In his illustration of the redemptive 'historical apocatastasis' involved in the critical 'cultural-historical dialectic' of Convolute N (considered in the previous chapter during the discussion of the refractive medium of historical expression), Benjamin's reference to the dialectical contrasts embodied in a film of *Faust* probably has in mind not Méliès' versions, however, but F. W. Murnau's more recent Expressionist production of *Faust: A German Folk Legend* [*Volkssage*], which received its official 1926 premiere in Berlin.<sup>149</sup> The process of synthetic refraction by which the past is brought into the

---

Press, 2000), p.3), and Alec Worley says this 'distinctive aesthetic' was 'inspired by a form of popular French theatre...[k]nown as the féeries (Alec Worley, *Empires of the Imagination: A Critical Survey of Fantasy Cinema from Georges Méliès to The Lord of the Rings*, (Jefferson, North Carolina & London, McFarland and Company, Inc., 2005), p.21).

145 Siegfried Kraucauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1960), pp.32 & 36.

146 'The show within a show reminds us that Méliès had included lantern slide projections of his caricatures as part of the regular program at the Robert-Houdin [theatre]. The Magic Lantern also has a particular appeal to contemporary students of film by the way it makes explicit references to the process by which the filmic illusion is created, philosophically engaging in a dialectic between the machinery of illusion, the medium which records those illusory images, the creators of illusion, and the viewer in whose mind the several aspects are synthesized and given meaning' (John Frazer, *Artificially Arranged Scenes: The Films of Georges Méliès*, (Boston, Mass., G. K. Hall & Co., 1979), p.130).

147 Siegfried Kraucauer, *Theory of Film*, op. cit., p.32.

148 'This [*The Damnation of Faust* - 1903] was the third of four films that Méliès extracted from the Faust legend. He had made his *Damnation of Faust* in 1898 and his first *Faust and Marguerite* in 1897...[In *Faust and Maguerite* - 1904] Faust goes to the Walpurgis night with Mephistopheles, where they are entertained by history's famous courtesans' (John Frazer, *Artificially Arranged Scenes: The Films of Georges Méliès*, op. cit., pp.131-2 & 140).

149 'Isn't it an affront to Goethe to make a film of *Faust*, and isn't there a world of difference between the poem *Faust* and the film *Faust*? Yes, certainly. But, again, isn't there a whole world of difference between a bad film of *Faust* and a good one? (*AP* N1a, 4). In this respect,

present in Benjamin's description concerns what he calls 'the indestructibility of the highest life in all things', the afterlife of cultural works paradoxically predicated on the very possibility of the "death" of the "original" (*AP* N1a, 4 & <O°, 1>). The previous chapter considered the Goethean resonances of this eschatological tendency, and it is fitting that Benjamin exemplifies his dialectical methodology with reference to the afterlife of *Faust* itself.

Adorno's criticism of Benjamin's deployment of the concept of the phantasmagoria is that its presence in the essay on Baudelaire and the *Arcades Project* itself assumes a phantasmagorical character: 'I approached the satanic scene must as Faust approached the phantasmagoria of the Brocken on the mountain, when he thought that many a riddle would now be solved. May I be excused for having to give myself Mephistopheles' reply that many a riddle poses itself anew?'<sup>150</sup> But Benjamin replies that the concept had been 'integrated into the construction' of his study rather than theoretically articulated.<sup>151</sup> What Benjamin calls the 'pedagogical side' of the project therefore involves the theological "education" of the "image-making medium within us", rather than the impossible task of the rational demystification of this religious aspect of the commodity phantasmagoria (cf. *AP* N1, 8 & <O°, 2>). He goes on to associate both the model for *and* the historical object of this image-making education as film: 'Method of the project: literary montage. I need say nothing. Only show'; 'The refuse- and decay-phenomenon as precursors...of the great syntheses to follow. These worlds of static realities are to be looked for everywhere. Film, their centre' (*AP* N1a, 8 & Y1, 4 & <O°, 2>). In the practice of montage Benjamin discovers a process of photographic, allegorical conjuration that expresses its own principle of construction: the juxtaposition of images in such a way that their synthetic continuity in the mind of the engaged subject provokes a critical perception of the static temporality, finitude and multitude of the images employed in the underlying medium. In the theses 'On the Concept of History', Benjamin evokes the 'constructive principle [*konstruktives Prinzip*]' which the dialectical materialist must employ as one comparable to a 'time lapse camera' [*Zeitraffer*], which permits the completing 'days of

---

Matt Erlin points out that whilst contemporary historians tend, like film historian Georges Sadoul, to regard Murnau's work as 'a great film that equals for the first time the great *Fausts* of literature...audiences and critics in Weimar Germany, however, were less impressed' (Matt Erlin, 'Tradition as Intellectual Montage: F. W. Murnau's *Faust* (1926)', *Weimar Cinema: An Essential Guide to Classic Films of the Era*, ed. Noah Isenberg, (New York & Chichester, West Sussex, Columbia University Press, 2009), p.155). Benjamin's return to Berlin in October 1926 coincides with *Faust's* official premiere on 14th October 1926 (cf. Walter Benjamin, Letter to Hugo von Hofmannsthal (dated Berlin, October 30<sup>th</sup>, 1926), *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin 1910-1940*, op. cit., p.307).

150 Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetics and Politics*, (London, New Left Books, 1979), pp.126-7.

151 Ibid., p.138.

remembrance' to become visible.<sup>152</sup>

What is apparent from the proceeding analysis is that this critical version of phantasmagoric presencing and dialectical understanding of semblance historically depicted in the fantasy of film expresses the underlying Goetheanism of Benjamin's tender empiricism. Despite Adorno's sympathetic awareness of the literary resonances in Benjamin's deployment of the concept, he failed to grasp how the dialectical aspect of Goethean semblance is methodologically tied to the construction of *Urphänomen*. The struggle waged between Benjamin and Adorno over the problematic presence of Jung in the *Arcades Project* testifies to Adorno's Freudian (and perhaps ultimately Enlightenment) rejection of mystical experience. When he castigates democratic versions of socialism for lacking a dialectical conception of history, Benjamin attributes this failure to the profound mark left by Darwinian science, whose 'evolutionary view of history burdened the concept of "development" more and more as the party became less willing to risk what it had gained in the struggle against capitalism' (*EF* 273). Such "Darwinism" encapsulates as scientific doctrine the religious structure of capitalism, which is unreflectively adopted by the Social Democratic Party when it seeks to attribute deterministic traits to history by tracing back political principles to supposedly natural laws, putting its new scientific faith in a 'stalwart optimism' with regard to progress.

Benjamin returns to this theme in the 'Paralipomena' to 'On the Concept of History', where he follows Emile Meyerson in designating the 'quintessence of the positivistic "scientific" character as 'the substitution of homogeneous configurations for changes in the physical world'.<sup>153</sup> Historicism betrays the same viewpoint when it regards historical understanding as the emphathetic projection of the past into the present, a 'false-aliveness of the past-made-present' which eliminates 'every echo of "lament" from history' and 'marks history's final subjection to the modern concept of science'.<sup>154</sup> Benjamin invokes the figure of Meyerson here to oppose this dogmatic, "modern" conception of science, although the previous chapters have sought to demonstrate the extent to which Goethe's tender empiricism is not only pitted against the Newtonianism of this scientific positivism, but that Benjamin's philosophy utilises the *Urphänomen* to construct a dialectical and messianic concept of history in opposition to it.

Benjamin's attempt to reconcile the philosophical strands of his materialist theory of ideas and his dialectical conception of history results in a dialectical version of historical materialism that distances itself from its orthodox formulation through a critique of Marxism. Writing of his experience of socialist Russian in the late 1920s,

---

152 Walter Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History', *SW4* p.395.

153 Walter Benjamin, 'Paralipomena to On the Concept of History', *SW4* p.401.

154 Walter Benjamin, 'Paralipomena to On the Concept of History', *SW4* p.402.

Benjamin emphasises the utter contingency of the political situation, claiming that ‘in schematic form, Moscow...reveals the full range of possibilities: above all, the possibility of the revolution’s utter failure and of its success’, and noting that it is ‘impossible to predict what the upshot of all this will be...Perhaps a true socialist community, perhaps something entirely different’.<sup>155</sup> His article for the German journal *The Creature* [*Die Kreatur*] therefore sought to represent this experience by depicting the moment of historical contingency through an image of Moscow. Whereas Kant sought to grasp the French Revolution as a historical sign of inexorable moral progress, Benjamin presents the contingency of Russian Revolution through a dialectical image of the city and its people. To do so he must “seize” and “comprehend” the ‘very new and disorientating language that loudly echoes through the acoustic mask of an entirely transformed environment’.<sup>156</sup> This “creatural” language must be allowed to ‘speak for itself’, Benjamin explains in a letter to Martin Buber, it cannot be theoretically articulated. The article would therefore be ‘a picture of the city of Moscow as it is at this very moment. In this picture “all factuality is already theory” and therefore it refrains from any deductive abstraction, any prognostication, and, within certain bounds, even any judgement...’. This formulation takes up Goethe’s description of a tender empiricism which seeks a higher standpoint through the synthetic construction of the *Urphänomen*, echoing Benjamin’s description of a dialectical judgement exemplified in the phantasmagoric practice of montage.(cf. *MR* #430).

Following his acquaintance in the mid-1920s with the Bolshevik pedagogy of Asja Lacis and the dialectical materialism of Georg Lukács’ *History and Class Consciousness*, Benjamin speaks of his desire, evinced as ‘Communist signals’, to no longer ‘mask the actual and political elements of my ideas’.<sup>157</sup> He therefore speaks in a more explicitly materialist way of the methodology for his article on Moscow being formulated ‘only on the basis of economic facts, and not at all on the basis of “spiritual” data’.<sup>158</sup> In Convolute N of the *Arcades Project* this identity between the methodology of tender empiricism and a dialectical version of historical materialism is explicit: the ‘origin [*Ursprung*] of the forms and mutations of the Paris arcades from their beginning to their decline’ are to be located in ‘economic facts’, which are to be constructed as the ‘primal phenomenon [*Urphänomen*]’ of history ‘insofar as in their own individual development – “unfolding” might be a better term – they give rise to the whole series of the arcade’s concrete

---

155 Walter Benjamin, Letter to Martin Buber (dated February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1927), *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin: 1910-1940*, op. cit., p.313; Walter Benjamin, Letter to Julia Radt (dated December 25<sup>th</sup>, 1926), *ibid.*, p.311.

156 Walter Benjamin, Letter to Martin Buber (dated February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1927), *ibid.*, p.313.

157 Walter Benjamin, Letter to Gershom Scholem (dated December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1924), *ibid.*, pp.257-8.

158 Walter Benjamin, Letter to Martin Buber (dated February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1927), *ibid.*, pp.132-133.

historical forms, just as the leaf unfolds from itself all the riches of the empirical world of plants' (*AP* N2a, 4). The presentation of such an *Urphänomen* is defined as the dialectical image (*AP* N9a, 4). Benjamin is clear, however, that these economic facts do not exhibit such a synthesis 'from the standpoint of causality...and that means considered as causes' (*AP* N2a, 4). This deployment of the Goethean figure of the *Urphänomen* reiterates the critique of the causal, rather than expressive, relation between base and superstructure presented in the orthodox Marxist materialism considered above, and the critical necessity for an imagistic rather than conceptual synthesis which follows from this.

## Epilogue: Walter Benjamin in Goethe's Dream House

*In a dream I saw myself in Goethe's study. It bore no resemblance to the one in Weimar...I sat down beside Goethe. When the meal was over, he rose with difficulty, and by gesturing I sought leave to support him. Touching his elbow, I began to weep with emotion.*

– Walter Benjamin, 'Number 113', *One-Way Street*

The opening vignettes of *One-Way Street* traverse a backward course from the modern Berlin Filling Station to the Paris arcades of the nineteenth century; from the praxis of writing to the interior dream-house of Number 113, in the arcades of the Palais Royale.<sup>1</sup> If the passage from present to past proceeds via the more familiar route of the Surrealist interstices of the dream – the Breakfast Room in which Benjamin 'avoids a rupture between the nocturnal and daytime worlds' – the destination is nonetheless surprising. The cellar in 'the house of dream' at Number 113 leads up into the vestibule of Goethe's home in Weimar. Benjamin has been here before, however, and he will return here again: on reaching the visitor's book, he finds his name 'already entered in big, unruly, childish scrawl' and in sitting for dinner he finds the table prepared for his relatives and ancestors, past and future. Yet, as Benjamin himself exclaims, when the 'house of our life...is under assault and enemy bombs are taking their toll, what enervated, perverse antiquities do they not lay bare in the foundations!'.<sup>2</sup> The preceding discussion has intended to expose an important, perhaps perverse, Goethean stratum at the foundations of Benjamin's philosophy. It remains here to briefly respond to some of the problems raised in this exposition and to gesture towards the contemporary relevance or philosophical value of Benjamin's Goetheanism.

In *The Concept of Criticism* and the *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Benjamin introduces Goethe's thought as dialectical counterpart to Early German Romanticism, which permits a critical development of the concept of experience inherent to their theory of criticism. As we have seen, Goethe's thought provides an objective account of ideas, a negative principle of judgement, and a refractive medium of experience which provides the counterpoise to the subjectivity and positivity of Romantic reflection. A number of recent commentators, however, have questioned Benjamin's exposition of Early German Romanticism in these early works and criticised the one-sidedness of his account. 'It is ironic indeed that this work of Benjamin's should have become so widely influential in

---

1 'Filling Station' concerns 'significant literary effectiveness' under the present 'construction of life' as a 'strict alternation between action and writing', in which the writer applies a little oil of opinion to the 'hidden spindles and joints' in the 'vast apparatus of social existence' (Walter Benjamin, 'One-Way Street', *SWI* p.444). 'Number 113', as Margaret Cohen points out, refers to the 'notorious gambling den at No. 113, in the arcades of the Palais-Royale – immortalized in Georg Emanuel Opiz's 1815 watercolour, "*La Sortie du Numéro 113*"' (Margaret Cohen, *op. cit.*, p.174).

2 Walter Benjamin, 'One-Way Street', *SWI* p.445.



recent years,’ writes Marcus Paul Bullock, ‘because it represents an attempt to overcome gaps in Schlegel’s oeuvre which no longer exist’.<sup>3</sup> The emphasis placed upon the Romantic concept of reflection – both in Benjamin’s essay and in the interpretation of Benjamin’s philosophy which is offered in the chapters above – is flatly rejected by Bullock, who argues that ‘the concept of *Reflexion* does not have such a high priority in Schlegel’s thinking as Benjamin assumes’, and is ‘distinctly secondary to *produktive Fantasie* (“productive imagination”)’.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, it is this aspect of the productive phantasy that I have counterpoised to Romantic reflection by drawing upon Goethe and Jung’s theory of Ideas. Winfried Menninghaus similarly claims that ‘Benjamin’s “deduction” of the immediacy of reflection is too simplistic by far, and that the level it works on...is more apt to draw out contradictory conclusions’.<sup>5</sup> She argues that in Fichte’s later account, ‘the act of “self-grasping” in reflection at the same time is an act of “self-destruction”’ and that Benjamin circumvents the unconscious capacity of the productive imagination which the Romantics valued so highly as a ‘hovering between being and not-being’.<sup>6</sup>

This project has concerned itself with the way in which Benjamin interprets and appropriates Romanticism, and one of its faults lies in skirting over the issue of the accuracy of his reading. If Romanticism already contains this dialectical antithesis, it does indeed seem perverse to make a digression into Goethe’s unsystematic philosophical opinions. Nonetheless, one of the arguments which underpins the preceding discussion is that Benjamin’s later materialism is the prepared for by the objective content of Goethe’s concept of experience and that his concern with the formalism of Romantic criticism arises from a recognition of the limitations of their idealism. Hence, Marcus Bullock claims that Schlegel is ‘much more radical an idealist than Fichte’ and concludes that the ‘religious function of artistic productivity [*Fantasie*] should be a major contradiction of the Messianic order which Benjamin attempts to ground in *Reflexion*’.<sup>7</sup> ‘Indeed it can be shown that there is an immediate contradiction of the Messianic idea necessitated by Schlegel’s position here’, Bullock continues, because the ‘never-ending progressivity of imaginative production precludes any image of redemption in finality or completion’.<sup>8</sup> Yet it is precisely for this reason, I have argued, that Benjamin turns not to a Romantic but to a Goethean account of phantasy and genius to develop, to borrow Joanna Hodge’s

---

3 Marcus Paul Bullock, op. cit., p.78.

4 Ibid., p.91.

5 Winfried Menninghaus, op. cit., p.29.

6 Ibid., p.44.

7 Marcus Paul Bullock, op. cit., p.92.

8 Ibid., p.93.

phrase, a 'strong aesthetics'.<sup>9</sup>

It would be interesting, in this context, to investigate Menninghaus's claim that 'Schelling's absence' from the essay on Romanticism is a 'logical function of the dissertation's content, with Benjamin foregoing any explicit discussion of Schelling so as not to compromise his exposition'.<sup>10</sup> Despite the similarities between Goethe's and Schelling's philosophies of nature, Goethe distinguishes his position from Schelling on the basis that Schelling 'is seldom capable of recognizing law in an individual case' (*MR* #1374). But this recognition is the very basis of Goethe's concept of the *Urphänomen* – and therefore of their differing conceptions of the symbolic – and its absence from Schelling's philosophy would seem to seriously undermine its possibility as a conceptual resource for Benjamin's dialectical image. Again, Benjamin's use of Goethe seems to have provided him with the precise elements he required to ferment the unorthodox materialism of his later philosophy.

This fortuitousness raises a related issue in Benjamin's practice of interpretation: his appropriation of Goethe. Esther Leslie's discussion of the "intensification" of Goethe's dialectic calls into question the mortuary aspect of Goethean refraction which has been emphasised in this work. As Leslie points out, the principle of polarity that is present in Goethe's theory of chromatic and biological metamorphosis 'led always towards a progressive enhancement or intensification', which omits the contradictory element of regression.<sup>11</sup> I disagree with Runge's formulation of Goethean metamorphosis which Leslie draws upon in her discussion, since it is equally the aberrant and strange that Goethe is interested in.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, Goethe distances his notion of dialectic from that of Hegel on precisely this point of actuality. When Hegel writes in the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that, 'The bud disappears when the blossom breaks through, and we might say that the former is refuted by the latter; in the same way when the fruit comes the blossom may be explained to be a false form of this plant's existence, for the fruit appears as its true nature in place of the blossom', Goethe angrily responds that, 'It is scarcely possible to say anything more monstrous'.<sup>13</sup> Paul Lauxtermann points out that this 'typical sample of "dialectics"...was repugnant to a man like Goethe who...saw the plant as a living force that reveals itself with equal truthfulness at each stage of its growth'.<sup>14</sup> As I have tried to suggest in the preceding discussion, Benjamin valued

---

9 Joanna Hodge, op. cit., p.16.

10 Winnfried Menninghaus, op. cit., p.45.

11 Esther Leslie, *Synthetic Worlds*, op. cit., pp.69-70.

12 'For Goethe, while the plant is growing regularly and healthily all is progress, for, from the first seed-leaves to the final ripening of the fruit, progressive metamorphosis is at work, pushing the plant forward' (Esther Leslie, *Synthetic Worlds*, op. cit., pp.69-70).

13 Lauxtermann, *Schopenhauer's Broken World-View*, pp.117-8.

14 Ibid.

Goethe's concept of synthesis precisely because it preserved something of the antinomical character of Kant's philosophy, appearing as a tense interruption or pregnant pause in the movement of nature, in which the outmoded and strange lingers in conjunction with the anticipated and the new as a virtuality distinct from present actuality.

Nonetheless, this concept of intensification remains a primary feature of Goethe's scientific writings. To the extent that I have thematized Benjamin's Goetheanism as a rejection of the trope of Enlightenment reflection which runs through Kantian, neo-Kantian, vulgar Marxist, Freudian, and – in a distinct way – Romantic thought, I have concurred with Habermas' characterisation – if not his evaluation – of Benjamin's philosophical practice as “rescuing” rather than “consciousness-raising” critique.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, I have drawn upon Hamann, Goethe and Jung as figures in a tradition of metacritique in order to defend the experiential, empirical, expressive, imagistic and refractive aspects of Benjamin's thought. When Benjamin claims that Goethe's *Faust* is ‘a screen on which he projects a magnified image of the world of the statesman in all its ramifications’, he adds that this image ‘at the same time shows all its defects intensified to the point of grotesqueness...’.<sup>16</sup> Richard Lane goes as far as to describe this as a Deleuzian folding of the Enlightenment into the Baroque.<sup>17</sup> I think there is a case to be made for examining the “progressiveness” of Goethean intensification upon lines closer to a Jungian or Deleuzian account of individuation and have hinted at suggestions for this approach in my discussion of Goethe. But this perspective remains, at best, latent in Benjamin's appropriation and it is fairer to say that he omitted any discussion of intensification and laid immediate claim to the destructive, mortuary and literary aspect of Goethe's thought in order to distance the poet from those that would seek to utilise him for purposes of political unification. Benjamin constructs a “secret Goethe”, like he reveals the ‘lineaments of a “secret Germany”’.<sup>18</sup> But what is buried deep in the foundations of Benjamin's appropriation is what he elsewhere describes as the rescuing of the ‘humanity’ of great writers. Benjamin had to bury Goethe in order to preserve him.<sup>19</sup>

The Preface to this work suggested that the metacritique of the purism of historical

---

15 Jürgen Habermas, ‘Walter Benjamin: Consciousness-raising or rescuing critique’, *Walter Benjamin: Critical Evaluation in Cultural Theory*, op. cit., Volume 1, p.131.

16 Richard J. Lane, *Reading Walter Benjamin: Writing through the Catastrophe*, (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2005), p.88.

17 Ibid., p.88.

18 Walter Benjamin, ‘German Letters’, *SW2* p.466.

19 Walter Benjamin, ‘On the Trail of Old Letters’, *SW2* p.557.

reason, required to negotiate a path between “neo-Kantian” and “neo-Hegelian” tendencies, would entail the radicalization of the idea of historical significance via a recognition of the negative and mortuary aspect of the relationship between criticism and the living thing. Benjamin’s well-known description of his thought being saturated with theology like a blotting paper is with ink figuratively expresses this destructive dialectic. If ‘the blotting paper had its way,’ Benjamin concludes, ‘nothing of what is written would remain’ (*AP* N7, a7). The preceding chapters have sought to make out a similar, murky relationship to an implicit and underlying Goetheanism, of which only isolated, partial maxims emerge as legible out of the inky darkness. Benjamin’s appropriation of Goethe puts his literary, aesthetic, and scientific thoughts into the service of philosophy to interpose into the speculative concept of experience an existential element of completion. In doing so he recovers a metaphysics of history. To the extent this is missing from the poststructuralist play of signifiers, elevated to a regulative and futural ideal in neo-Kantianism, or an eternalization of the present in neo-Hegelianism, the necessary image of catastrophic completion is omitted from experience. Benjamin’s concept of experience is a Faustian wager on history itself.

## Bibliography

### Abbreviations:

AP = Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*.  
CC = Walter Benjamin, 'The Concept of Criticism in Early German Romanticism', *SW1*.  
EF = Walter Benjamin, 'Eduard Fuchs', *SW3*.  
GEA = Walter Benjamin, 'Goethe's Elective Affinities', *SW1*.  
LS = Walter Benjamin, 'The Life of Students', *SW1*.  
LSLM = Walter Benjamin, 'On Language as Such and the Language of Man', *SW1*.  
OGT = Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*.  
OSMB = Walter Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', *SW4*.  
PCP = Walter Benjamin, 'On the Program of the Coming Philosophy', *SW1*.  
P = Walter Benjamin, 'On Perception', *SW1*.  
SW = Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*.  
TT = Walter Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', *SW1*.

CJ = Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*.  
HC = Andrea Poma, *Hermann Cohen's Critical Idealism*.  
KTE = Hermann Cohen, *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung*.

CW = J. W. von Goethe, *Collected Works*.  
MR = J. W. von Goethe, *Maxims and Reflections*.

CW = Carl Gustav Jung, *Collected Works*.  
RAPP = Carl Gustav Jung, 'On the Relation of Analytical Psychology and Poetry', *CW15*.  
SE = Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*.  
TSL = Carl Gustav Jung, 'Transformation and Symbols of Libido', *CW5*.

### Primary and Secondary Texts:

Adorno, Theodor W., *Aesthetics and Politics*, (London, New Left Books, 1979).  
– *Against Epistemology: A Metacritique (Studies in Husserl and the Phenomenological Antinomies)*, trans. Willis Domingo, (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1982).  
– *The Culture Industry*, ed. J. M. Bernstein, (London & New York, Routledge, 2002).  
– and Benjamin, Walter, *Briefe*, eds. Gershom Scholem & Theodor Adorno, (Frankfurt am Maine, 1978).  
– and Benjamin, Walter, *The Complete Correspondences 1928-1940: Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin*, ed. Henri Lonitz, (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1999).  
– and Scholem, Gershom (eds.), *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin: 1910-1940*, (Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press, 1994).

Alford, C. Fred, *Narcissism: Socrates, the Frankfurt School, and Psychoanalytical Theory*, (New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 1988).

Althusser, Louis, 'Contradiction and Overdetermination: Notes for an Investigation', *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster, (London, Penguin Press, 1969).  
– *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster, (London, New Left Books, 1970).  
– 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus', *Essays on Ideology*, (London, Verso, 1984).

Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Malcolm Heath, (London, Penguin, 1996).

Asman, Carrie L., 'Theatre and Agon/Agon and Theatre: Walter Benjamin and Florens Christian Rang', *MLN*, Vol. 107, No. 3, (April 1992).

Atkins, Stuart, *Goethe's Faust: A Literary Analysis*, (Cambridge, MA., Harvard University Press, 1958).

Banham, Reyner, 'The Glass Paradise', *The Anti-Rationalist and the Rationalists*, ed. Nikolaus Pevsner, J. M. Richards, Dennis Sharp, (Oxford, Architectural Press, 2000).

Barber, John, *The Road from Eden*, (Palo Alto, CA., Academica Press, LLC, 2008).

Battersby, Christine, *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics*, (Bloomington, Indiana, Indiana University Press, 1989).

Bennett, Benjamin, *Goethe as Woman: The Undoing of Literature*, (Detroit, MI., Wayne State University Press, 2001).

Benjamin, Andrew, *Translation and the Nature of Philosophy: A New Theory of Words*, (London & New York, Routledge, 1989).

- *Present Hope: Philosophy, Architecture, Judaism*, (London & New York, Routledge, 1997).
- *Philosophy's Literature*, (Manchester, Clinamen, 2001).
- *Walter Benjamin and Art*, (London, Continuum, 2005).
- and Osborne, Peter (eds.), *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy: Destruction and Experience*, (London & New York, Routledge, 1994).
- and Hanssen, Beatrice (eds.), *Walter Benjamin and Romanticism*, (London, Continuum, 2002).

Benjamin, Walter, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann & Hermann Schweppenhauser (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972-1989).

- *Briefe*, eds. Gershom Scholem & Theodor Adorno, (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp Verlag 1978).
- *Walter Benjamin: Moscow Diary*, ed. Gary Smith, (Cambridge, MA. & London, Harvard University Press, 1986).
- *Selected Writings*, ed. Howard Eiland & Michael W. Jennings, (Cambridge, MA., & London, Harvard University Press, 1991-1999).
- *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin: 1910-1940*, eds. Gershom Scholem & Theodor W. Adorno, (Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press, 1994).
- *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne, (London, Verso, 1998).
- *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland & Kevin McLaughlin, (Cambridge, MA. & London, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999).
- *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock, (London, Verso, 2003).
- and Adorno, T. W., *The Complete Correspondences 1928-1940: Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin*, ed. Henri Lonitz, (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1999).

Bershtein, Evgenii, 'The Withering of Private Life: Walter Benjamin in Moscow', *Everyday Life in Early Soviet Russia: Taking the Revolution Inside*, eds. Christine Kiaer & Eric Naiman, (Bloomington & Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 2006).

Betz, John R., *After Enlightenment: The Post-Secular Vision of J. G. Hermann*, (Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

Bird, Graham, 'The Neglected Alternative: Trendelenburg, Fischer, and Kant', *A Companion to Kant*, ed. Graham Bird, (Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2006).

Bishop, Paul (ed.), *Companion to Goethe's Faust Parts I and II*, (Rochester, NY. & Woodbridge, Suffolk, Camden House, 2001).

- *Analytical Psychology and German Classical Aesthetics: Goethe, Schiller and Jung*, Volume 1: The Development of Personality, (Hove & New York, Routledge, 2008).
- and Stephenson, R. H., *Friedrich Nietzsche and Weimar Classicism*, (Rochester, NY. & Woodbridge, Suffolk, Camden House, 2005).

Black, Joel, 'Scientific Models', *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, ed. Marshall Brown, Volume 5, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000).

Bortoft, Henri, *The Wholeness of Nature: Goethe's Way of Science*, (Edinburgh, Floris Books, 1996).

- 'Counterfeit and Authentic Wholes: Finding a Means for Dwelling in Nature', *Janus-Head*, 8, 1, (Summer, 2005).

Brady, R. H., 'The causal dimension of Goethe's morphology', *Journal of Social and Biological Structures: Studies in Human Social Biology*, 7, 4, (October, 1984).

- 'The Idea in Nature: Rereading Goethe's Organics', *Goethe's Way of Science: A Phenomenology of Nature*, eds. David Seamon & Arthur Zajonc, (New York, SUNY, 1998).

Brudo, Annie, *Rêve et fantastique chez Julien Green*, (Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1995).

Buck-Morss, Susan, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, (Cambridge, MA. & London, MIT Press, 1989).

Bullock, Paul, Marcus, *Romanticism and Marxism: The Philosophical Development of Literary Theory and Literary History in Walter Benjamin & Friedrich Schlegel*, (New York, Bern & Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, 1987).

Cassirer, Ernst, *Rousseau, Kant, Goethe: Two Essays*, trans. James Gutmann, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall Jr., (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1970).

Cassirer, H. W., *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Judgement*, (London, Methuen, 1970).

Caygill, Howard, 'Stelarc and the Chimera: Kant's Critique of Prosthetic Judgement', *Art Journal*, 54, (Spring, 1997).

– *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience*, (London & New York, Routledge, 1998).

Cohen, Hermann, *Kants Begründung der Ethik*, (Berlin, Dümmler, 1877).

– 'Einleitung mit kritischem Nachtrag zu F. A. Langes Geschichte des Materialismus', *Geschichte des Materialismus*, (Baedeker, Leipzig, 1896).

– *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung*, (Berlin, Bruno Cassirer, 1918).

– *Schriften zur Philosophie und Zeitgeschichte*, 1 & 2 Bde. hg. Von Albert Görland & Ernst Cassirer, (Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 1928).

– *Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism*, trans. Simon Kaplan, (New York, Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1972).

– *Reason and Hope*, trans. Eva Jospe, (New York, Norton, 1973).

– *Werke*, hg. Vom Hermann-Cohen-Archiv am Philosophischen Seminar (Hildesheim, Zurich & New York, Georg Olms, 1977-84).

Cohen, Margaret *Profane Illumination: Walter Benjamin and the Paris of Surrealist Revolution*, (Berkeley & Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1993).

– 'Walter Benjamin's Phantasmagoria', *New German Critique*, 48, (Autumn, 1989).

Cowan, Bainard, 'Walter Benjamin's Theory of Allegory', *New German Critique*, 22, (Winter, 1981).

Creuzer, Friedrich, *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker, besonders der Griechen*, 1. Theil. 2., völlig umgearb. Ausg., (Leipzig, Darmstadt, 1819).

Croce, Benadetto, *The Essence of the Aesthetic*, trans. Douglas Ainslie, (London, 1951).

Crowell, Steven Galt, *Husserl, Heidegger, and the Space of Meaning: Paths toward Transcendental Phenomenology*, (Evanston, Illinois, Northwestern University Press, 2001).

Dawson, Terence, 'Literary Criticism and Analytical Psychology', *The Cambridge Companion to Jung*, 2nd Edition, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008).

Derrida, Jacques, 'Marx and Sons', *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's Spectres of Marx*, (London & New York, Verso, 1999).

Desaulniers, Mary, *Carlyle and the Economics of Terror: A Study of Revisionary Gothicism in the French Revolution*, (Montreal, Quebec & Kingston, Ontario, McGill-Queens University Press, 1995).

Dickson, Gwen Griffith, *Johann Georg Hamann's Relational Metacriticism*, (Berlin & New York, Walter de Gruyter, 1995).

Don, Gary W., 'Goethe, Boretz, and the Sensuous Idea', *Perspectives of New Music*, 34, 1, (Winter, 1996).

Elizabeth, Ezra, *Georges Méliès: The Birth of the Auteur*, (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000).

Emerson, Ralph Waldo, 'Goethe, the Writer', *Representative Men*, (Cambridge, MA. & London, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996).

Erlin, Matt, 'Tradition as Intellectual Montage: F. W. Murnau's Faust (1926)', *Weimar Cinema: An Essential Guide to Classic Films of the Era*, ed. Noah Isenberg, (New York & Chichester, West Sussex, Columbia University Press, 2009).

Fehér, István M., 'Lask, Lukács, Heidegger: the problem of irrationality and the theory of the categories', *Martin Heidegger: Critical Assessments*, ed. Christopher E. Macann, Volume II, (London & New York, Routledge, 1992).

Ferenczi, Sándor, 'The Ontogenesis of Symbols', *Contributions to Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Ernest Jones, (London, Stanley Phillips, 1916.)

Fink, Karl J., *Goethe's History of Science*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991).

Flax, Neil, 'Goethe's Faust II and the Experimental Theatre of His Time', *Comparative Literature*, 31, 2, (Spring, 1979).

– 'The Presence of the Sign in Goethe's Faust', *PMLA*, 98, 2, (March 1983).

Forrester, John, *The Seductions of Psychoanalysis: Freud, Lacan and Derrida*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990).

Frazer, John, *Artificially Arranged Scenes: The Films of Georges Méliès*, (Boston, Mass., G. K. Hall & Co., 1979).

Franz, Marie-Louise von, *Alchemy: An Introduction to the Symbolism and the Psychology*, (Toronto, Inner City Books, 1980).

Freud, Sigmund, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey, (London, The Hogarth Press, 1995).

- and Jung, C. G., *The Freud-Jung Letters: The Correspondence between Sigmund Freud and C. G. Jung*, (Princeton, NJ., Princeton University Press, 1974).

Frisby, David and Featherstone, Mike (eds), *Simmel on Culture*, (London, Sage Publications, 1997).

Gáborm, Zemplén, 'Form as Movement in Goethe's Metamorphosis of Plants' (<http://hps.elte.hu/~zemplen/goethemorph.html>, accessed 10/10/07).

Gardner, Sebastian, *Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason*, (London & New York, Routledge, 1999).

Gasché, Rudolphe, 'Objective Diversions: On Some Kantian Themes in Benjamin's "Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"', *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy: Destruction and Experience*, eds. Andrew Benjamin & Peter Osborne, (London & New York, Routledge, 1994).

Goethe, J. W. von, *Sämtliche Werke*, (Hellen, Stuttgart, Berlin, Jubiläums-Ausgab, 1907).

- *Goethe's Poems*, trans. Martin Schütze, (London, Ginn & Company, 1916).
- 'The Metamorphosis of Plants', *Goethe's Botany: The Metamorphosis of Plants and Tobler's Ode to Nature*, ed. Agnes Arber, *Chronica Botanica* Volume 1, (Waltham, Mass., 1946).
- *Die Schriften zur Naturwissenschaft*, Deutschen Akademie der Naturforscher, (Weimar, Leopoldina, 1947-1970).
- *Die italienische Reise, Gedenkausgabe der Werke, Briefe und Gespräche*, ed. Ernst Beutler, Volume 11, (Zürich, Artemis-Verlag, 1949).
- *Goethes Briefe*, (Hamburg, Hamburger Ausgabe IV, 1952).
- *Goethes Werke*, ed. Dorothea Kuhn, (Hamburg, Christian Wegner Verlag, 1955).
- *Letters from Goethe*, trans. M. von Herzfeld & C. Melvil Sym, (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1957).
- *Goethe's Theory of Colour*, ed. Maria Schindler, (Sussex, New Knowledge Books, 1964).
- *Italian Journey*, trans. W. H. Auden & Elizabeth Mayer, (London, Penguin, 1970).
- *Elective Affinities*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Penguin Books, 1971).
- J. W. von Goethe, *Goethe: Selected Verse*, (London, Penguin, 1986).
- *Collected Works*, ed. Douglas Miller, (Princeton, NJ., Princeton University Press, 1988).
- 'On Morphology', *Goethe's Botanical Writings*, trans. Bertha Mueller, (Woodbridge, Connecticut, Ox Bow Press, 1989).
- 'An Attempt to Interpret the Metamorphosis of Plants', *Essays in Philosophical Zoology*, ed. Adolf Portmann, (Problems in Contemporary Philosophy Volume 20), (Lampeter, The Edwin Meller Press, 1990) (reprinted from Agner Arber, *Chronica Botanica*, 10, 2).
- *Maxims and Reflections*, trans. Elisabeth Stopp, (London, Penguin Books, 1998).
- *West-Eastern Divan – West-Östlicher Divan: Bi-lingual Edition*, trans. John Whaley, (Berlin, Peter Lang, 1998).
- 'Note and Queries for a Better Understanding', *Other Voices*, trans. Jorg Waltje, 2, 2, (March, 2002).

Gorky, Maxim, 'The Lumière Cinematographe', *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939*, eds. Richard Taylor & Ian Christie, (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1988).

Green, Julien, *Adrienne Mesurat* (trans. as *The Closed Garden*), trans. Henry Longan Stuart, (New York & London, Harper & Brothers, 1928).

Habermas, Jürgen, 'Walter Benjamin: Consciousness-raising or rescuing critique', *Walter Benjamin: Critical Evaluation in Cultural Theory*, ed. Peter Osborne, Volume 1: Philosophy, (London & New York, Routledge, 2005).

Hamacher, Werner, 'Guilt History: Benjamin's Fragment "Capitalism as Religion"', *Cardozo Law Review*, 26, 3, (2005).

Hamann, Johann Georg, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, ed. Kenneth Haynes, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007).



Hansen, Miriam, 'Benjamin, Cinema and Experience: "The Blue Flower in the Land of Technology"', *Walter Benjamin: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory*, ed. Peter Osborne, Volumes 3: Modernity, (Abingdon & New York, Routledge, 2005).

Hanssen, Beatrice 'Philosophy at Its Origin: Walter Benjamin's Prologue to the *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*', *MLN*, 110, 4, (September, 1995).

– and Benjamin, Andrew (eds.), *Walter Benjamin and Romanticism*, (London & New York, Continuum, 2002).

Hegel, G. W. F., *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1979).

Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson, (Oxford & Malden, MA., Blackwell, 1962).

– *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. James C. Churchill, (Bloomington, Indiana, Indiana University Press, 1962).

– *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, (Bloomington, Indiana, Indiana University Press, 1995).

Heinemann, Fritz, 'Goethe's Phenomenological Method', *Philosophy* 9, 33, (January, 1934).

Herbert, Jack, *The German Tradition – Uniting the Opposites: Goethe, Jung and Rilke*, (Temenos Academy, 2001).

Hodge, Joanna, 'The Timing of Elective Affinity: Walter Benjamin's Strong Aesthetics', *Walter Benjamin and Art*, ed. Andrew Benjamin, (London & New York, Continuum, 2005).

Hoffmann, Nigel, 'The Unity of Science and Art: Goethean Phenomenology as a New Ecological Discipline', *Goethe's Way of Science: A Phenomenology of Nature*, eds. David Seamon & Arthur Zajonc, (New York, SUNY, 1998).

Hollington, Michael, 'Benjamin, Fourier, Barthes', *With The Sharpened Axe of Reason: Approaches to Walter Benjamin*, ed. Gerhard Fischer, (Oxford & Herndon, Va., Berg, 1994).

Husserl, Edmund, *Experience and Judgement: Investigations in a Genealogy of Logic*, trans. James S. Churchill & Karl Ameriks, (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973).

– *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr, (Evanston, Illinois, Northwestern University Press, 1989).

– *On the Idea of Phenomenology*, trans. Lee Hardy, (AA Dordrecht, The Netherlands, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999).

– *Logical Investigations*, trans. J. N. Findlay, Volume 1 & 2, (London & New York, Routledge, 2001).

Jacobsen, Eric Paul, *From Cosmology to Ecology: The Monist World-View in Germany from 1770 to 1930*, (German Life and Civilization, Volume 43), (Oxford, Peter Lang, 2005).

Joseph, Steven M., 'Fetish, Sign and Symbol Through the Looking-Glass: A Jungian Critique of Jacques Lacan's Ecrits', *The San Francisco Jung Institute Library Journal*, 7, 2, (1987).

Jung, Carl Gustav, *Collected Works*, eds. Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, Gerhard Adler, (London & Henley, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981).

– *Memories, Dreams, Reflection*, ed. Aniela Jaffe, (New York, Fontana Press, 1995).

Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar, (Indianapolis, Hackett, 1987).

– *The Conflict of the Faculties*, trans. Mary J. Gregor, (Lincoln & London, University of Nebraska Press, 1992).

– *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar, (Indianapolis, Hackett, 1996).

– *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. Robert B. Louden, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006).

– 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose', *Kant: Political Writings*, 2nd Edition, ed. Hans Reiss, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991).

Karatani, Kojin, *Transcritique: On Kant and Marx*, trans. Sabu Kohso, (Cambridge, MA., & London, MIT Press, 2005).

Kerr, John, *A Most Dangerous Method: The Story of Jung, Freud, and Sabina Spielrein*, (London, Sinclair-Stevenson, 1994).

Kerslake, Christian, *Deleuze and the Unconscious*, (London & New York, Continuum, 2007).

Kiaer, Christine & Naiman, Eric (eds.), *Everyday Life in Early Soviet Russia: Taking the Revolution Inside*, (Bloomington & Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 2006).

Kim, Alan, 'Paul Natorp', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Fall 2003 Edition, ed. Edward N. Zalt, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2003/entries/natorp/> (accessed 25/09/09).

Kisiel, Theodore, 'Why Students of Heidegger will have to read Emil Lask', *Man and World*, 28, 3, (July, 1995).

Kluback, William, *The Legacy of Hermann Cohen*, (Atlanta, Georgia, Scholars Press, 1989).

Kofman, Sarah, *Camera Obscura: Of Ideology*, trans. Will Straw, (London, Athlone Press, 1998).

Köhnke, Klaus Christian, *Entstehung und Aufstieg des Neukantianismus*, (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1986).

– *The Rise of Neo-Kantianism*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991).

Kraucauer, Siegfried, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1960).

Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe, 'Introduction to Walter Benjamin's *The Concept of Art Criticism in German Romanticism*', *Walter Benjamin and Romanticism*, eds. Beatrice Hanssen & Andrew Benjamin, (London & New York, Continuum, 2002).

Lambrianou, Nikolaus, 'Neo-Kantianism and messianism: origin and interruption in Hermann Cohen and Walter Benjamin', *Walter Benjamin: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory*, ed. Peter Osborne, Volume 1, (London & New York, Routledge, 2005).

Lamport, F. J., 'Synchrony and Diachrony in Faust', *Oxford German Studies*, 15, (1984).

Lane, Richard J., *Reading Walter Benjamin: Writings through the catastrophe*, (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2005).

Lanzoni, Rémi Fournier, *French cinema: from its beginnings to the present*, (London & New York, Continuum, 2002).

Laplanche, Jean, Entry on 'Deferred Action', *International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Alin de Mijolla, (Detroit, MI., Macmillan Publishing, 2004).

Lask, Emil, *Die Lehre vom Urteil*, (Tübingen, J.C.B. Mohr, 1912).

– *Die Logik der Philosophie und die Kategorienlehre: eine Studie über den Herrschaftsbereich der logischen Form*, (Tübingen, J. C. B. Mohr, 1993).

Lauxtermann, Paul F. H., *Schopenhauer's Broken World-View: Colours and Ethics between Kant and Goethe*, Science and Philosophy Series Vol. 10, (Dordrecht, The Netherlands, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000).

Lenoir, Timothy, 'The eternal laws of form: morphotypes and the conditions of existence in Goethe's biological thought', *Journal of Social and Biological Structures: Studies in Human Social Biology*, 7, 4, (1984).

Leslie, Esther, *Hollywood Flatlands: Animation, Critical Theory and the Avant-Garde*, (London & New York, Verso, 2004).

– *Synthetic Worlds: Nature, Art and the Chemical Industry*, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Reaktion Books, 2005).

Liddell, Henry George & Scott, Robert, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996), p.1118.

Lodder, Christine, *Russian Constructivism*, (New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 1983).

Löwy, Michael, *Fire Alarm: Reading Walter Benjamin's 'On the Concept of History'*, trans. Chris Turner, (London & New York, Verso, 2005).

Lukacher, Ned, 'Walter Benjamin's Chthonian Revolution', *boundary 2*, 11, 1, 2, Engagements: Postmodernism, Marxism, Politics, (Autumn, 1982/Winter, 1983).

- Lukács, Georg, *Soul and Form*, trans. Anna Bostock, (London, Merlin Press, 1974).
- *Goethe and His Age*, trans. Robert Anchor, (London, Merlin Press, 1979).
  - *Essays on Realism*, ed. Rodney Livingstone, (London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1980).
- Lyotard, Jean-François, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington & Brian Massumi, (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1984).
- Marx, Karl, *Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. M. Nicolaus, (London, Penguin, 1973)
- *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone & Gregor Benton, (Penguin Books, London, 1992).
  - ‘The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte’, *Marx’s Eighteenth Brumaire*, trans. Terrell Carver, (London, Pluto Press, 2002).
  - *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ernest Mandel, Volume 1, (Penguin, London, 1990).
  - and Engels, Friedrich, *The Communist Manifesto*, (Penguin, London, 1985).
  - *The German Ideology*, ed. C. J. Arthur, (New York, International Publishers, 2004).
- McCarthy, John Aloysius, *Remapping Reality: Chaos and Creativity in Science and Literature*, (Amsterdam & New York, Rodopi, 2006).
- McCole, John Joseph, *Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition*, (Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 1993).
- Menninghaus, Winfried, ‘Walter Benjamin’s Exposition of the Romantic Theory of Reflection’, *Walter Benjamin: Critical Evaluation in Cultural Theory*, ed. Peter Osborne, Volume 1, (London & New York, Routledge, 2005).
- Meyer, Richard M., ‘Über das Verständnis von Kunstwerken’, *Neue Jahrbücher für das klassische Altertum, Geschichte und deutsche Literatur*, IV, (1901).
- Molnár, Géza von, *Goethes Kantstudien*, (Weimar, Verlag Hermann Böhlau Nachfolger, 1994).
- Motzkin, Gabriel, ‘Emil Lask and the Crisis of Neo-Kantianism: The Rediscovery of the Primordial World’, *Revue de Metaphysique et de Morale*, 94, 2, (April-June, 1989).
- Muenzer, Clark S., ‘Fugitive Images and Visual Memory in Goethe’s Discourse on Colour’, *The Enlightened Eye: Goethe and Visual Culture*, eds. Evelyn K. Moore & Patricia Anne Simpson, Amsterdam Beiträge zur Neueren Germanistik: Volume 62, (Amsterdam & New York, Rodopi, 2007).
- Munk, Reiner (ed.), *Hermann Cohen’s Critical Idealism*, Amsterdam Studies in Jewish Thought, Volume 10, (Dordrecht, The Netherlands, Springer Verlag, 2005).
- Myers, Benjamin, *Milton’s Theology of Freedom*, (Berlin & New York, Walter de Gruyter, 2006).
- Nerval, Gérard de, *Oeuvres*, ed. Henri Lemaître, (Paris, Garnier, 1958).
- *Selected Writings*, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Penguin, 1999).
- Nicholls, Angus, *Goethe’s Concept of the Daemonic: After the Ancients*, (Rochester, NY. & Woodbridge, Suffolk, Camden House, 2006).
- Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Arnold Kaufmann & R. J. Hollingdale, (New York, Vintage Books, 1967).
- *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York, Vintage Books, 1974).
  - *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Clifton P. Fadiman, (New York, Dover Publications, 1995).
- Osborne, Peter, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde*, (London, Verso, 1995).
- *Philosophy in Cultural Theory*, (London & New York, Routledge, 2000).
  - (ed.), *Walter Benjamin: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory*, Volumes 1-3, (Abingdon & New York, Routledge, 2005),
  - *How to Read Marx*, (London, Granta, 2005).
- Patton, Lydia, *Hermann Cohen’s History and Philosophy of Science*, Phd Thesis, McGill University, (2004).
- Phelan, Anthony, ‘The Classical and the Medieval in Faust II’, *A Companion to Goethe’s Faust Parts I and II*, ed. Paul Bishop, (Rochester, NY. & Woodbridge, Suffolk, Camden House, 2001).
- Pizer, John, ‘Goethe’s “Urphänomen” and Benjamin’s “Ursprung”: A Reconsideration’, *Seminar*, 25, 3, (1989).
- *Towards a Theory of Radical Origin*, (Lincoln, Nebraska, University of Nebraska Press, 1995)

- Plato, *Republic*, trans. Paul Shorey, (Cambridge, MA. & London, Harvard University Press, 1969).
- *Symposium*, trans. M. C. Howatson, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008).
- Poma, Andrea, *The Critical Philosophy of Hermann Cohen*, (Albany, NY., SUNY, 1997).
- *Yearning for Form and Other Essays on Herman Cohen's Thought*, Dordrecht, The Netherlands, Springer, 2006).
- Porter, Laurence M., 'Real Dreams, Literary Dreams, and the Fantastic in Literature', *The Dream and the Text: Essays on Literature and Language*, ed. Carole Schreier Rupprecht, (Albany, NY., SUNY, 1993).
- Rang, Florens Christian, 'Goethes Selige Sehnsucht', *Neue deutsch Beiträge*, 1. Folge. 1. Heft. (1922/23), reprinted *Interpretationen zum west-östlichen Divan Goethes*, ed. Edgar Lohner, (Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1973).
- Reidel-Schrewe, Ursula, 'Key and tripod in mikhail Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*', *Neophilologus*, 79, 2, (April, 1995).
- Reik, Theodor, *Surprise and the Psycho-analyst: On the Conjecture and Comprehension of Unconscious Processes*, trans. Margaret M. Green, (London, Kegan Paul, 1936).
- Richards, Robert J., 'The Erotic Authority of Nature: Science, Art, and the Female during Goethe's Italian Journey', *The Moral Authority of Nature*, eds. Lorraine Daston & Fernando Vidal, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2003).
- Ricoeur, Paul, *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen Blamey & David Pellauer, Volume 3, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1988).
- Roberts, Edwin A., *The Anglo-Marxists: A Study in Ideology and Culture*, (Maryland & Oxford, Rowman and Littlefield, 1997).
- Rodchenko, Alexander, 'Puti sovremennoi fotograffi', *Novyi lef*, 9, (1928).
- Roff, Sarah Ley, 'Benjamin and Psychoanalysis', *The Cambridge Companion to Walter Benjamin*, ed. David S. Ferris, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004).
- Rose, Gillian, *Hegel Contra Sociology*, (London, Althone, 1981).
- *Judaism and Modernity: Philosophical Essays*, (Oxford, Blackwell, 1993).
- Rosenzweig, Franz, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 3, (Dordrecht, Martinus Nijhoff, 1984).
- *The Star of Redemption*, trans. Barbara Ellen Galli, (Madison, Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin Press, 2005).
- Samuels, Andrew, *The Political Psyche*, (London & New York, Routledge, 1993).
- Andrew Samuels, 'National Psychology, National Socialism, and Analytical Psychology: Reflections on Jung and anti-Semitism (Parts I & II)', *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 37, 1 & 2, (1992).
- Sandford, Stella, '"All Human beings are pregnant": the bisexual imaginary in Plato's Symposium', *Radical Philosophy*, 150, (July/August 2008).
- Santner, Eric L., *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2001).
- *On Creaturely Life*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2006).
- Scholem, Gershom, *Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship*, trans. Harry Zohn, (New York, New York Review Books, 1981).
- Schöne, Albrecht, *Faust: Kommentare*, (Frankfurt am Main, Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1994).
- Seamon, David, 'Goethe, Nature and Phenomenology: An Introduction', *Goethe's Way of Science: A Phenomenology of Nature*, eds. David Seamon & Arthur Zajonc, (Albany, NY., SUNY, 1998).
- & Zajonc, Arthur (eds.), *Goethe's Way of Science: A Phenomenology of Nature*, (Albany, NY., SUNY, 1998).
- 'Goethe's Way of Science as a Phenomenology of Nature', *Janus-Head*, 8, 1, (Summer 2005).
- Sedlymar, Hans, 'Towards a Rigorous Study of Art', *The Vienna School Reader: Politics and Art Historical Method in the 1930s*, ed. Christopher S. Wood. (New York, Zone Books, 2000).

Seethskin, Kenneth, 'Jewish Neo-Kantianism: Hermann Cohen', *History of Jewish Philosophy*, Routledge History of World Philosophies, Volume II, (London & New York, Routledge, 2003).

Sepper, Dennis L., 'Goethe and the Poetics of Science', *Janus-Head*, 8, 1, (Summer, 2005).

Sieg, Ulrich, 'Die frühe Hermann Cohen und die Völkerpsychologie', *Ashkenas*, 13, 2, (2003).

Simmel, George, *The Problems of the Philosophy of History: An Epistemological Essay*, trans. Guy Oakes, (New York, The Free Press, 1977).

- 'Introduction to Philosophical Culture', *Simmel on Culture*, eds. David Frisby & Mike Featherstone, (London, Sage Publications, 1997).

Simms, Eva-Maria, 'Goethe, Husserl, and the Crisis of the European Sciences', *Janus-Head*, 8, 1, (2005).

Steiner, Uwe, "'Zarte Empirie": Überlegungen zum Verhältnis von Urphänomen und Ursprung im Früh- und Spätwerk Walter Benjamins', *Antike und Moderne: Zu Walter Benjamins Passagen*, ed. Richard Faber, (Würzburg, Norbert W. Bolz, 1986)

- 'The True Politician: Walter Benjamin's Concept of the Political', trans. Colin Sample, *New German Critique*, 83, (2001).

Stephenson, R. H., *Goethe's Conception of Knowledge and Science*, (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1995).

- 'Binary Synthesis: Goethe's Aesthetic Intuition in Literature and Science', *Science in Context*, 8, 4, (2005).

Stern, Daniel, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant: A view from Psychoanalysis and Developmental Psychology*, (New York, Basic Books, 1985).

Taylor, Bayard, *Faust*, (Leipzig, F. A. Brockhaus, 1872).

Tantillo, Astrida Orle, *Goethe: The Will to Create*, (Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002).

Tarabukin, Nikolai, *Ot mol'berta k mashine, Rabotnik Prosveshcheniia*, (Moscow, 1923).

Tietz, Uto, 'German Existence-Philosophy', *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism*, eds. Hubert L. Dreyfus & Mark A. Wrathall, (Oxford, Blackwell, 2006).

Toscano, Alberto, *The Theatre of Production: Philosophy and Individuation between Kant and Deleuze*, (Basingstoke & New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

Trendelenburg, Adolf, *Logische Untersuchungen*, (Leipzig, S. Herzel, 1862).

Trueman, Carl R, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, (Aldershot, Hampshire & Burlington, VT., Ashgate Publishing, 2007).

Unsold, Siegfried, *Goethe and His Publishers*, trans. Kenneth J. Northcott, (Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press, 1996).

Warner, Marina, *Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors, and Media in the Twenty-First Century*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006).

Weber, Samuel, *Benjamin's -abilities*, (Cambridge, MA., & London, Harvard University Press, 2008).

Weigel, Sigrid, *Body- and Image-Space: Re-Reading Walter Benjamin*, (London & New York, Routledge, 1996).

Williams, John R., 'The Problem of the Mothers', *A Companion to Goethe's Faust: Parts I and II*, ed. Paul Bishop, (Rochester, NY. & Woodbridge, Suffolk, Camden House, 2001).

Wisser, Richard, *Vom Weg-Charakter Philosophischen Denkens: Geschichtliche Kontexte und menschliche Kontakte*, (Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann, 1998).

Witte, Bern, *Walter Benjamin: An Intellectual Biography*, trans. James Rolleston, (Detroit, MI., Wayne State University Press, 1991).

- 'Die Aktualität des Klassikers. Walter Benjamin und Goethe', *Studie Germanici (nuova serie)*, 40, 3, (2002).

Wohlfarth, Irving, 'The Messianic Structure of Benjamin's Last Reflections', *Walter Benjamin: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory*, ed. Peter Osborne, Volume 1, (Abingdon & New York, Routledge, 2005).

Wolin, Richard, *An Aesthetics of Redemption*, 2nd Edition, (Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA., University of California Press, 1994).

Wölfflin, Heinrich, *Classic Art: An Introduction to the Italian Renaissance*, trans. Linda & Peter Murray, (London, Phaidon, 1952).

Wood, Christopher S. (ed.), *The Vienna School Reader: Politics and Art Historical Method in the 1930s*, (New York, Zone Books, 2000).

Worley, Alec, *Empires of the Imagination: A Critical Survey of Fantasy Cinema from Georges Méliès to The Lord of the Rings*, (Jefferson, North Carolina & London, McFarland & Company, Inc., 2005).

Zajonc, Arthur, 'Goethe and the Science of his Time: An Historical Introduction', *Goethe's Way of Science: A Phenomenology of Nature*, eds. David Seamon & Arthur Zajonc, (New York, SUNY, 1998).